

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

## A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF ST. MATTHEW VI.16-VII.27

BY

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# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

(MATTHEW vi. 16—vii. 27.)

*Uniform with this Volume*

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. A Practical  
Exposition of St Matthew v.—vi, 8 (including the  
Beatitudes).

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. A Practical  
Exposition of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew vi,  
9-13).



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# FASTING

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.



## FASTING

“When ye fast, etc.”—MATTHEW vi. 16-18.

WE come now to the final application of the new principle of righteousness which Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Already we have seen its effect on the Jewish theory and practice both of almsgiving and prayer, and we have now to see it applied to the duty of fasting. Here, too, its result is revolutionary,—so much so, indeed, that by many of the followers of Christ His teaching here has been held equivalent to the uncompromising repeal of the law which bade men fast. In spiritualising the ordinance He, to all intents and purposes, does away with it.

As usual, Jesus starts with the condemnation of the Jewish practice. It was the habit of the stricter among the Jews, especially of the Pharisees, not only to observe the stated legal and public fasts, but also to fast regularly all the year round on the second and fifth days of the week. And in thus fasting their conduct was regulated in a nicely graduated scale, according to the strictness of the self-denial required. In less severe fasts they would wash and anoint them-

selves, in others they would do neither, and in others again they would abstain from everything which might be regarded as in the remotest degree pleasant. They generally preferred to fast in the most public manner possible, as this actually added to the merit of the thing, besides setting a good example. The fasting in itself was held to be a good thing, and the merit attached to it gave him who practised it a certain claim upon God. By this self-denial it was conceived that pressure was put upon the Divine Being, and His favours could then be extorted almost as a right—*e.g.*, one of the chief objects of the public fasts among Jews was that rain might be obtained in due season. It was ordained that if no rain fell before the 17th of a certain month, there should be a fast of three days. If the following month opened without rain, three general fasts were ordered. If no rain fell after these, three more fasts were ordered with special severities. If there was still no rain, there was to be a fast of seven days, and so on. The whole system had become a mere dead form, a cut-and-dried scheme for getting as much out of God as possible. And the teaching of Jesus in regard to it is perfectly simple. He transfers attention from the outside to the inside. True fasting is not that which is seen of men but of God; the mere denying oneself food, looking miserable, and living in dirt is not fasting at all. The thing begins in the inner man, in the spirit, and if that is right then the externals matter little or nothing.

No apology need be offered for treating this



subject. We may not recognise any obligation to fast. We shall not be far wrong in our interpretation of the words of Jesus if we say that logically they involve the abolition of abstinence from food as a religious exercise. They do much more than that, however. If Jesus had said simply, "Thou shalt not fast," we might have rested in the mere negative conclusion. But when He bids us fast so as to be seen, not of men, but of the Father who seeth in secret, we know that there is a positive command involved which it is our business to investigate and obey. The Jews fasted in order that they might obtain certain spiritual blessings; Jesus bids us attain to a spiritual attitude which will best express itself by some kind of fasting. To a Jew the important thing was the external result; for Jesus it was the internal motive or spring of action, and there is all the difference between the two.

But in spite of this difference may we not say that the main idea which underlay both the Jewish practice and the teaching of Jesus in this matter of fasting was one and the same? In both cases it was simply the close communion between the bodily and spiritual life. Soul and body, spirit and flesh, act and react upon each other. The recognition of this truth has affected the whole religious history of the world. The Jew denied himself food and lived in sackcloth and ashes because he had a dim notion that by thus abasing the body religion was honoured and God pleased. So the monk in his lonely cell starves and scourges his flesh that his spirit may be

exalted, and the soul's vision become more keen. And the modern Churchman or Roman Catholic abstains from certain foods in Lent that he may bring down his pride, that his outward life may more conform to the solemnity of the season, and his spirit live more really by the abasement of his body. And the value and the beauty of this belief Jesus recognised and taught in many ways. The link between the spirit and the flesh is a very close one. And if it is only too sadly possible for men to exalt the flesh at the expense of the spirit and to let the brute in them triumph, so surely it is possible for them also to trim and train the flesh so that even it shall minister to the spirit's growth. The difficulty of this process, however, is obvious, and was well illustrated by the abuse of fasting among the Jews. And the difficulty is this: constituted as men are, they tend inevitably to lay such stress on the mortification of the body as altogether to lose sight of the spiritual end it has in view, and apart from which it is valueless and even mischievous. The denial of the body becomes an end in itself, meritorious for its own sake, and independent of any spiritual purpose it may serve. So we find not only among Jews but among people of all types and grades of religion this sad result, that those who are most strict in the observance of these outward forms are often the least spiritually minded. Their religiousness defeats its own end, for it puts the practice of bodily mortification in the place of that which it was originally intended to obtain. The

denial of the body becomes a hindrance rather than a help to the attainment of the spiritual life.

Now it was from this abuse of the system that Jesus started in His positive teaching. No doubt body and spirit are closely allied, and the one may be so treated as intimately to affect the other. But how if you so spend your care on the body as to neglect rather than help the spirit? In all these matters the spiritual purpose must be kept in the front, which is its proper place. And if you are to deny the body, such denial will come best as the natural result of your spiritual attitude. In bidding men fast primarily for God and under His sight, Jesus is reversing the usual order of things. He would have bodily abstinence follow as an effect of the true spiritual life rather than be indulged in as a means of producing it. No doubt such abstinence will in its turn prove a true instrument of spiritual culture, but it will only do this as it is kept strictly subordinate to the spiritual end. Now I cannot but feel that here is an aspect of the question which we need to bring carefully before us. We are still suffering from the mistakes of the Pharisees, modern as well as ancient; and because some have grievously abused bodily self-denial, we are inclined to look upon the practice as in every sense a mechanical religious exercise. And yet, so far from condemning, Jesus expressly enjoins it, only under such limitations and conditions as to avoid the danger of abuse.

Taking, then, the word fasting to include all bodily abstinence, let us look at it once more in the light of

Christ's teaching and example. To put the matter in a nutshell it comes to this: no man will ever become spiritual by denying his body, but he will deny the body because he is spiritual, and will become more spiritual in so doing. This is the only reasonable way of stating the matter. Not until a man becomes conscious of spiritual things does he discover the true relation between soul and body, and learn that the influence of the body upon the soul is always negative rather than positive, and that the body acts upon the soul by not standing in its way rather than by actually helping it on the upward path.

But this will be made clear by illustration rather than by argument. Picture to yourself a man who has just undergone a great religious awakening, and who has begun to live unto God rather than unto himself. The first effect of his new birth is that he feels himself in a new and stronger attitude towards his body and his bodily needs. These can no longer take the same place in his thoughts and desires that they once held. He looks above and beyond them. Because he is spiritual, necessity is laid upon him to crucify the flesh. He has entered consciously upon the great conflict which every religious man has to endure, and in which the flesh and the spirit strive for the mastery, and, as he stands outside and looks on at it, in which God and the devil strive for his own soul. And the man very speedily begins to feel the tremendous nature of this struggle and the vastness of the issues at stake. It is a matter of sheer and

desperate necessity that he master his body ; the alternative is that it will master him. And his new experience makes itself felt throughout the whole of his life. The seriousness of his spirit is reflected in his outward actions. He comes to deny himself many lawful pleasures and indulgences, not simply in order that he may be spiritual, but because he is spiritual, and fails now to find in these quarters the joy and satisfaction that he once found. The true value of cell and cloister is not for those who use them as antidotes against a world which they would fain enjoy to the full, but rather for those who find there their chief joy, the realisation of those special hopes and aims on which they are wholly bent. And so life presents itself in a new guise to the man who has awakened to his spiritual needs and state. It is simpler and more sober than it was. He is content with plainer food and barer walls and less gorgeous raiment. The pomps and vanities of this world pall upon him, and he needs far fewer of those things in which many men count their pleasures to consist. And in fasting, abstaining from these things, he is not so much denying himself, as realising the new and better self of which he has become conscious. His self-restraint is at once an expression of his changed inner life, and a means of its cultivation.

In the same spirit the man regulates his dealing with the clamorous crowd of pleasures and passions which surround him. He has an eye to God and to His will, and therefore, again, necessity is laid upon

him to yield first to those higher influences which proclaim themselves as divine. He has other work than merely to please himself, and even his pleasures must remain innocent, and he himself pure. No doubt this will lead him to renounce much that he would like, and that would not be unlawful, but the renunciation is not the unnatural, violent thing it sometimes seems, it is not a means of forcing the spiritual growth, but rather a fair and proper outcome of the life of the soul when the follower of Christ naturally bears the cross. Once we grasp the idea which Jesus sets before us continually, that fasting and self-denial are the natural results of the religious life, and will not in themselves produce it, we shall be much nearer both His spirit and practice. The spirit of penitence in which the Christian life begins; the heart of a little child, which is the passport to the Kingdom of Heaven; the abandonment of pride that comes with honest confession of sin: these things are incompatible with a comfortable self-indulgence; they constrain a man, in spite of himself, to fast. And this spirit is one that still sorely needs to be cultivated by the followers of Jesus Christ. The reaction against the Pharisaic abuse of fasting has gone too far. In the discovery that self-denial will not make them religious, men have forgotten that their religion should cause them to deny themselves. They are no longer anxious to appear to fast, either before men or God. It would be ludicrous, were it not rather pitiable and sad, to see the strenuous

efforts men put forth to prove to themselves that religion was never designed to make their pleasures less, and that they are perfectly justified in seeking to make the best of both worlds. And some plain speaking on the matter is becoming very necessary. It is perfectly true that we cannot specially please God, or increase the measure of our own spiritual life, by mere abstention from certain foods and drinks, To eat no meat in Lent or on Fridays, and to go to Communion hungry, these are the mere pettiness of self-denial, valueless either as discipline or example.

On the other hand, if we be true followers of Christ, then we shall assuredly fast, only in far different, far more serious, fashion. We have to be seen to fast by our Father in Heaven, and there is a deep and serious meaning in the words. I cannot believe that God takes any special interest in the amount of food we consume, but I am sure that when He manifests His Son in us He creates a spirit and brings forth a life that is utterly incompatible with much that belongs to the life and spirit of the world. Even Christians have in recent years greatly changed in this respect. We smile at the strictness of our fathers, and rejoice in our own emancipation. But are we not paying a heavy price for our freedom? The constant pursuit of pleasure, which is so striking a sign of our times, is not the outcome of the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is not that we have to lay down strict rules for Christians, and forbid them this and that. To do so is to attack the evil at the wrong

side. The pity is that those who call themselves Christians can take pleasure in some of the amusements of the world, and that their religion should not have created a distaste for all that appeals only to the lower instincts and to the carnal man. It is with the soul very much as with the mind. He who would cultivate the intellect must scorn delights and live laborious days, must find his chief pleasure in things intellectual, and come to shun all allurements of a more sordid and material kind. So the spiritually-minded man will favour the things of the spirit, and will therefore crucify the flesh. He will feel the crowd of pleasures, passions, and indulgences to be a dead weight upon his soul, and will only win true freedom as he escapes them into a higher and purer air. It is no mere ascetic plea, it is sober truth to say that the modern craving for amusements among Christians is a grave sign of spiritual deterioration, or even of impending death. And this is not a mere question of the legitimacy of certain pleasures, but rather how far it is right to yield to the pleasure-loving spirit. This each one must decide for himself, and in the sight of God ; only let us remember that there is no foe to faith like frivolity, and that the higher a man aims, the more resolutely must he cast behind him the lower ideals. If you cultivate the body it is at the expense of the soul, and if you would cultivate the soul, it must be at the expense of the body.



TREASURE IN HEAVEN

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.



## TREASURE IN HEAVEN

“Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, etc.”—MATTHEW vi. 19-23.

IN this new paragraph of the Sermon we enter on a new circle of ideas. Henceforth the teaching of Jesus becomes, so to speak, more purely spiritual in character. In His setting forth of the new law of the Kingdom, He has reached a point where He has no precedent to guide Him. So far He has kept more or less closely to the Mosaic dispensation. His precepts have followed the line of those most familiar in the every-day teaching of the Scribes. Now He takes a new departure, and enters upon a subject which is all His own. His method remains the same. He still insists on the inward point of view, delineates a religion of the heart rather than of outward conduct, but shows how this principle holds good all round, and is to be applied not only to those branches of conduct provided for in the ancient law, but to the whole of life. And it is in this sense that we may say that the teaching is henceforward more spiritual, that it brings spiritual principles to bear upon the whole of life, introduces them into regions where it

is not always easy to see how they can be made at home.

And so Jesus begins with a word that is startling enough to us, but must have been a veritable bomb-shell in the ears of the men who first heard it. Think of saying to a company of Jews, "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth." To listen to such a command would mean for them their occupation gone, and life deprived of its one absorbing interest and delight. I have no doubt the words of Jesus, in their bare directness, seemed as foolish and unpractical to them as they do to many a man to-day. But Jesus knew what He was saying, and He went on to give reasons for His speech of a kind that would commend themselves to the most commercial spirits. "Lay not up treasure on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." Property among Jews in the time of Jesus consisted largely in stuffs and embroidered goods, purple and fine linen. Rich men laid in large quantities of such things, and were often at their wit's end how to store them safely. And many a grave and bearded merchant in the audience of Jesus would think to himself that the Nazarene was not so foolish after all, as he remembered with a sigh how moth and mildew had done their work in the deep pits in which he had hidden his wealth, or how thieves had cut through the mud walls of storehouses and carried off his goods. Jesus was right enough, and certainly touched responsive chords in the hearts of His hearers, when

He reminded them of their wealth, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? It is gone." For riches certainly make themselves wings "like an eagle that fleeth toward Heaven." But all this is only an introduction to the main proposition which Jesus has in mind. There is a kind of wealth which is worth getting because once got it can be kept, and it is in this that Jesus is supremely interested. "But lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven." Here, then, for money-makers, is the positive teaching of Jesus on this subject—spiritual and material—of wealth. The thing He is concerned with is that they should lay up treasure in Heaven. We shall come at a future time to define more closely His attitude to earthly riches, which is not that they are to be utterly neglected, but rather regarded as good servants but bad masters. Meanwhile, the command to seek first and foremost treasure in Heaven is what we have to deal with.

In using the word Heaven here Jesus brings Himself into a line with all His thought and teaching as to the Kingdom. He refers, of course, not simply to the future abode of the blessed, but to that unseen spiritual world which exists alongside of, and is closely intermingled with, the seen and temporal. The sense of this and of its deep importance for man pervades the whole teaching of Jesus. It was this consciousness of the unseen which led Him to lay the stress He did on heart religion—to spiritualise moral teaching, and to translate the common and rather material conception of the Messianic reign into His

rich and gloriously spiritual idea of a Kingdom of Heaven. The life that He would have men live was a life unseen and eternal, the hopes and desires He would have them cherish were to be centred in God rather than in themselves, and the treasures He bade them amass were to be spiritual rather than material, in Heaven rather than on earth. And so, if we would at all grasp the significance of His teaching and relate it to our lives, it must be on the basis of a strong belief in the unseen and the eternal. If we have no consciousness, or even only a very dim consciousness of a spiritual and heavenly world in and around us, it will be difficult not to say impossible for us to lay up treasure there. The worst anti-Christ is he who minds earthly things. And, indeed, we have now little or no excuse for confining ourselves to that which is of the earth earthy.

It was once almost taken for granted that the more men knew the less reason would they have for belief in a spiritual world. The advance of science was taken to mean the decline of religion, and the more surely men came to speak about the phenomena of this universe; the more dim and uncertain would they become in regard to that which is unseen and eternal. But now all this is changed. We are coming to see how the slow growth of human knowledge is but a filling out of the content of the thought of God. So far from doing away with the spiritual and unseen, science is beginning to postulate it. The relation between science and

faith is no longer one of antagonism, but of co-operation. Where the one ends the other begins. So long as men thought that they could derive sensation from purely physiological processes, they might have hoped to reduce conscience, and even religion itself, to the same terms. But now when the biologist has to confess that the molecular change cannot in itself constitute sensation, but remains barren without that unknown but very powerful ordering capacity in the knowing mind, we have the spiritual principle not merely conceded but demanded by science itself. And we may fairly join in that great apostrophe of Emerson and say, "Oh, my brothers, God exists. There is a soul at the centre of Nature, and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe. It has so infused its strong enchantment into Nature that we prosper when we accept its advice, and when we struggle to wound its creatures our hands are glued to our sides or they beat our own breasts. The whole course of things goes to teach us faith."

We may say, therefore, that our concern is not so much to prove the existence of the spiritual world as to live in it. The one by no means follows from the other. The materialists with whom Jesus was dealing in the Sermon on the Mount were not speculative but practical. It was not that they did not believe in heavenly treasure; they did not care for it. And so to-day the difference is a practical one. Speculative or intellectual materialism

is a mere bogie, a man of straw, and there is neither pleasure nor profit to be obtained by knocking him down. The enemy we have to deal with is the practical materialist, the earthly mind that prefers treasure in coffers to treasure in Heaven, the very deadly and effective form of atheism that makes haste to be rich that the soul may take its ease, and leaves God out of the reckoning. It is to this temper of mind and heart, common to-day as it was in Palestine long ago, that Jesus addressed Himself when He said, "Lay up treasure in Heaven." Heaven is the safest storehouse known. What is laid up there is never stolen or spoiled. It is a place for all that is most precious. Paul endorses his Master's words when he says, "Seek those things which are above." This is our first business in life—to cultivate the spirit, to nourish the soul. Life consisteth not in the things we possess; we must be alive towards God before we can be said to live at all. One of the greatest of philosophers once said, "Man is born to be a citizen." He meant that the natural state of man was not his primitive savagery, but that civilisation to which he has shown himself capable of rising. And the words become still more true when we add to them the notion of Paul that our true citizenship is in Heaven, and there, naturally, are centred all man's truest interests, desires, and hopes. His treasure is in Heaven.

But the difficulty begins when we come to carry



out this command of Jesus. The belief in our spiritual destiny is natural enough; it never occurs to us to doubt it. But somehow the inheritance is tied up; we do not seem able to make it ours. Certain conditions have to be fulfilled. The getting of spiritual treasure is by no means easy. Just as for hidden treasure of the natural kind men will go on long and arduous quests, freely spending themselves for its sake, so with the secret treasures of the spiritual world. They need to be dug for, sought after, acquired with toil; they will not drop into the mouth like ripe fruit. A man has to assert himself in this quest, and show the stuff he is made of. The whole trend and tendency of his life here is against him in the search. "The world is too much with us, late and soon, getting and spending." "What shall we do to inherit eternal life?" say men. "Sell that thou hast, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven." And we go away sorrowful, for we know how hard it is. Here we are pent in the prison house of this life, full of its storm and stress, weighed down by our anxieties, grasping pleasure with both hands. Surely our treasure is here; or if we confess, as most of us do, that it is not, that there is something higher, that God has a claim upon us, that we have souls that need to be saved, a salvation that is to be worked out with fear and trembling, the higher life to be lived, Heaven to be won—if we confess this, we are fain to put it off from us as irrelevant to our present needs, as something to

be considered later on, when we have more time. And this goes on until the accumulated force of habit makes change impossible, and for us the treasure house of Heaven is empty. No! this business of amassing heavenly treasure needs close and constant attention—can no more bear neglect than the business by which you make your daily bread. Spiritual culture should demand and receive far more of our consecrated energy than it does. This will not involve a mere hermit existence. We can so use the treasures of this life as to touch them with the glow and splendour of the eternal. There is a rare beauty in that Apocalyptic dream which sees the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, built of gold and precious stones of the earth. It is out of our earthly toil and opportunities, hopes and fears, failures and successes, that we build for ourselves the heavenly life. By culture of the spirit, by prayer and self-denial, by worship and sacrifice, we lay up treasure in Heaven. And so, for the Christian, life consists in the abundance of this spiritual treasure. As the capacity of a ship is measured, not always by height of the mast or the spread of sails, but by the depth of water it draws, so the Christian's life is known and tested, not simply by its outward show, but by its relation to things unseen and eternal.

And where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. This is a truism, you say, but it is none the less true for that, and it is truth that has very inti-

mate bearings on religious life. Wherever a man's treasure is, there his heart, affections, and desires are ever centred. A man may travel in distant lands bent on business or adventure, but, as we say, he leaves his heart behind, in the home he loves, where wife and little ones await his return. So a man may spend himself on many occupations, but his heart will be in the one he loves, where are all his treasures of interest and desire. And the Christian, though he takes full and active part in the affairs of this world, and is diligent in business and fervent in spirit, will yet have his affections set on things which are above. You will easily see where his true treasure is when you note his attachment to the world and the spirit thereof. Here he is but a pilgrim and sojourner, he has no abiding city. His true life is not of the earth, but is hidden with Christ in God. And so, if a man's heart is set supremely upon Divine things, Jesus can leave the rest of his life to care for itself. Then it matters not how great his other possessions are. The danger in them is lest they come to master him ; but with his heart in the right place, he will master them and use them for the best and highest ends. Where his heart is, there will his treasure be.

But there is yet another turn that may be given to the words, another sense in which heart religion is of supreme importance for men. When men come to find their real treasure in spiritual things, they will take an interest in them that is deep, fervent, and

enthusiastic. And here is the word for us and our time. The reason that so much of our religious and church life is so languid and feeble is just that men put no heart into it. To all intents and purposes their treasure is not there, but in something else of a very different kind. Strange, is it not, that it should be counted a little vulgar and unseemly to be enthusiastic about religion, but quite proper to be desperately in earnest about money-getting, games, pleasure-taking of many kinds? And yet people will sing with the utmost complacency, "Religion is the chief concern of mortals here below"; and they will tell you that they really mean it, and believe it. Well, where the treasure is the heart is, and if your treasure is in religious things, if they really excite your interest and quick desire, then you will put some heart into it; you will be no lukewarm saints, but fired with deep and strong enthusiasm, which will tell vividly upon your life. This is the kind of religion Jesus Christ advocates in His teaching, and this is what we need to-day. If by some magic stroke we could but turn the crowds of languid worshippers in our churches to-day into men and women possessed by the belief that their treasure was in things unseen and eternal, what a change there would be. Nay, if we could but get them to face once the deep realities of religion with the interest they would show in choosing new clothes and buying a new house, what an awakening there would be. Where our treasure is, our hearts will be. If we believe in God and His

Christ, if we have felt anything of the Divine power and grace, if we have been conscious of sin and of forgiveness, then we shall surely be enthusiastic in our religion and in religious things. It will not be enough for us to leave it to the minister or any other delegated authority, we shall need to take close personal interest in Divine things, we shall be constant in prayer and praise, we shall cultivate the worship that is service, that ministers to the needs of others, and that makes for the greater glory of God.



TREASURES IN HEAVEN

BY REV. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.





## TREASURES IN HEAVEN

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—MATTHEW vi. 19, 20, 21.

“LAY not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth.” Taken quite literally, this word would keep savages in a barbaric state and send civilised society to ruin, just as the words “resist not evil,” taken quite literally, would hand over society to the thief and the violent.

Living in a rich, civilised society, certain persons may be most virtuous and refined, though possessed of no property. Learned men, poets, artists have not been men of property, though in this respect some change has come. But a tribe, a people without property, cannot be highly cultured. A tribe without treasure on earth, without corn and fruit, houses and institutions, is barbaric. Discipline that tribe into a habit of laying up treasures upon the earth, and the habit will involve a certain intellectual and moral education. In the mere saving or laying up of seed corn, they must exercise foresight. To further lay up,

industry, perseverance, economy must be exercised. Then, as each one comes to have something belonging to him and not to another, the principle of justice is somewhat developed. In the Divine government the laying up of treasure on earth is thus a path along which a savage tribe moves into the civilised state.

As in the tribe, so in the individual. The man in civilised society who is utterly improvident, who will not provide for the education of his children or for the time of sickness or for bad times, who, though he has the opportunity, never lays up treasure, what sort of a man is he? What would he and his family come to if it were not for the benevolence of society? The gospel of Thrift has been preached; it is not a great gospel, but it is a necessary one.

While, however, within limits the law of economy is the health of society, beyond those limits it is the very plague of society. Seeing the power and pleasure the possession of treasure on earth gives, men are seized with an insatiable desire to possess it. In inferior minds the treasure, from being sought for as a means, comes to be sought for as an end. They haste to be rich, and fall consequently into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction. In this wicked haste they forget God and neglect their soul. Their will to become rich becomes so strong that it will not be baulked by the guilt of some deceit and dishonesty, some oppression and cruelty. And when thus they have obtained the treasure, the heart being where the treasure is, when

they lose it or part of it, they lose heart, become sad, hopeless, wretched. Or if they retain the treasure, cares and fears, like rust, eat into their heart, or jealousies and enmities spoil, like moths, the value and use of their property. Alas! how is a prosperous, moneyed society spoiled by this moth and rust!

Now had Jesus Christ been speaking to a non-civilised society, a savage tribe, would He have said, "Lay not up treasures upon the earth?" I trow not. He would have said, "Lay up seed corn; cultivate your land."

Or if He had been speaking to men earning 30s. a week, but spending 12s. 6d. of it in beer and tobacco, belonging to no sick club and with no savings bank account, would He have said to them, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth"? Or if He had been speaking to people with incomes from £500 to £5000 a year, but spending every penny of it in extravagant living, would He have said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth?" Would He not rather have said, "Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves; be prudent; exercise thrift; do your duty towards your children and society"?

But Jesus Christ was not speaking to a non-civilised tribe, nor to such improvident people. He was speaking to the people of Galilee; to a rich society seeking further wealth with ruinous haste, among whom the thieves abounded and the moth and rust were active. Galilee, the north of Palestine, commercial, enterprising, energetic Galilee, was the

Lancashire of Palestine. To them, their riches moth-eaten, their treasures rusting, their hearts lost to God and good, Jesus Christ said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven."

How, then, can we lay up treasures in Heaven?

### I.

**We lay up treasures in Heaven, first, by laying up a godly character.**

It was said of the first Emperor Alexander of Russia that his personal character was equivalent to a constitution. During the wars of the Fronde, Montaigne was the only man among the French gentry who kept his castle gate unbarred; and it was said of him that his personal character was worth more to him than a regiment of horse. When Stephen of Colonna fell into the hands of his base assailants, and they asked him in derision, "Where is your fortress?" "Here," was his bold reply, placing his hand upon his heart. In misfortune truly godly character is invulnerable, inalienable; it is a reserve of incalculable value. And in all the conduct of life, character is treasure. What moral capital, secret influence, it gives the man! What was the value of Bright's or of Gladstone's character to the work they took in hand? How vastly rich and influential it

made their lives. What has been the worth of the character of our late Queen to England, and to the world? Character is a treasure which no thief can steal, and no moth can consume. Calamity cannot wrench character from us; not even slander can rob us of character, howbeit it may filch from us reputation. Death's strong hand cannot disrobe us of our character. Character is the one thing which we did not bring with us into the world, and it is the one thing it is certain we can carry out into that other world. Or, in the figure of our text, entering that other world we find its treasure there awaiting us.

Then, brethren, lay up for yourselves this treasure—character. To do so, see ever that you have the root of godly character—faith in Jesus Christ. Keep that root clean. Watch and feed it by constant prayer, and by increasing knowledge of the truth. In temptation, remember that better lose all than lose character.

## II.

**A wise use of earthly treasure is another way of laying up treasures in Heaven.**

I know a gentleman, a bachelor, having some, not much, earthly treasure, who took a promising young man and gave him a university education for the ministry of the Church. Not long since that young man was offered a bishopric. The mammon of

unrighteousness can be used in helping this or that worthy person, in maintaining this or that good work, or in putting down some evil, so that by it friends are made who shall receive us into eternal habitations—into richer character, larger sympathies, gracious friendships, happy relations, glorious faith and life.

But so to use the earthly treasure it is well to devote a proportion, a tenth or more or less, of our income to good work, and to keep a faithful account of it. We are so apt, if we give a little, to magnify it, to tell ourselves of it again and again, till we come to think it a great sum. Whereas, if recorded and looked at in reference to income, we shall see it does not stand for much. Money may impoverish or enrich our heaven. Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, by using for God and good the treasures of earth.

### III.

**And surely we lay up treasures in Heaven when for the Kingdom of God we endure loss and suffering.**

Because they would not deny Christ, how many of the early Christians lost their goods, how many endured imprisonment, and how many suffered martyrdom? By their losses and sufferings, did they not lay up for themselves treasures in Heaven, as

well as for all time enrich the Church and the world? Think of the great multitudes who, almost in every age, have endured loss and suffering for Christian truth—of the Albigenses, the Lollards, the Hussites, the Lutherans, the Reformers, the Puritans; think of those who to-day, for conscience' sake, suffer loss by refusing to enter into dishonourable business, or to invest in breweries or distilleries, or to take contracts at the price of bribing, or to take lucrative situations in which dishonesty must be practised. Do not all these lay up the treasure of a good conscience, of blameless character? Is not God well pleased with them? Will they not hereafter receive a recompense of reward? God will not be unmindful of their loss and suffering for His sake. Through all eternity, because of their fidelity, their life will be the fuller and their bliss the richer. They will rule over many cities. They lay up for themselves treasures in Heaven.

#### IV.

**And does not this apply to the enduring of the personal trials and troubles of life?**

Are we despitefully used? slighted, neglected, misrepresented, slandered by those who should have given us the opposite? Is not this a chance of investing patience, praying for enemies, forgivingness? Is not this a chance of laying up treasures in Heaven?

Or has sickness smitten those dear to us? has trouble upon trouble rolled in upon us? has burden upon burden been placed upon us, weight upon weight, till the life is well-nigh pressed out of us? Let us strive to use these as opportunities for laying up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. If in these dark hours we are trustful and hopeful in God, He will repay us well with the heavenly treasure of a tried faith, a disciplined character, a richer heaven.

## V.

**And all winning of souls to Christ is plainly a laying up for ourselves treasures in Heaven.**

Is it not good now and again to meet an old Sunday school scholar or some one who has heard us speak a word for Christ, who say to us, "I remember your saying so-and-so; I was greatly helped then;" or "That address you gave was blest to me; I then gave myself to God in Christ." The affection of such, their prayers, their goodwill here and hereafter is treasure which no thief can steal and no moth can corrupt. Heaven, indeed, will have treasure to some in spirits, there blest and helped by them when on earth. Be not weary in well-doing; you are among other things laying up treasure in Heaven.



## VI.

**And in quite an involuntary way are some having accumulated for them treasure in Heaven.**

The dear friend, the tenderly loved parent or child, husband or wife, who has passed within the veil, we have not lost them; they are as treasure laid up. Because they are in Heaven, Heaven is richer to us. Our treasure on earth they were, and our treasure in Heaven they will be.

There are then two orders of treasures—the earthly and the heavenly. Seeking too eagerly the earthly wealth many throw away their health, and then throw away their wealth seeking their health. But if they retain health, what is money without soul treasure! Much money and no resource in self, no wealth of character, no interest in life, no satisfaction in the respect of men and the esteem of friends. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? if he win a fortune and lose the Kingdom? Alas for such! Especially when one morning he opens his paper and sees that some thieves have broken through all his precautions, and all, or a good part of, his earthly treasure has gone. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal.

Our subject suggests that some will enter Heaven finding treasure there, and some finding none. Some have no holy ambition : if they squeeze into Heaven, they say, that is enough. Some will get into Heaven as through fire ; some will have the abundant entrance. Some in that city which hath foundations will start life there as it were without capital, others with treasure which there they have laid up. How will it be with you and me, brethren? Are we laying for ourselves treasures in Heaven? Nay ; do any say, on the contrary, I am deeply in debt to Heaven. Clear first the debt. How? Accept the free forgiveness of God in Christ : accept God's cancelling of thy debt for the sake of Christ who died for thy sin or debt. Forgive us our debts. Then lay up for yourself treasures in Heaven.

THE SINGLE EYE

BY REV. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.



## THE SINGLE EYE

“The lamp of the body is the eye ; if, therefore, thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness.”—MATTHEW vi. 22-23.

THERE is within us an organ to perceive the spiritual things, as there is in the body an organ to perceive the material things. This inner perceiving organ, when may it be said to be single, sound, so that it presents true images of spiritual things to the spirit? The context shows that in Christ's mind this singleness of eye is singleness of intention, oneness, pureness of motive. Christ has been condemning the Pharisees for their double-mindedness. In their almsgiving, their prayers, their fastings, they sought both to please God and to please man ; they were resolved both to lay up treasure in Heaven and on earth ; their eye was both upon Heaven and upon earth. Christ says no one can run these two purposes together ; one or other of them will be first ; the result is, the soul becomes distracted, confused, and finally the worldly purpose becomes ascendant, closing the spiritual eye and filling the soul with darkness. “Ye

cannot serve God and mammon." Let your eye be single ; run your life with but one purpose ; keep your eye singly on God ; and your whole body or life will be full of light. Perform your religious duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting with one purpose, and they will be true and blessed ; perform them with a double purpose, and they are neither religion nor worldliness ; you fall between the two into hypocrisy—a darkness greater than worldliness. How great is the darkness !

## I.

**We have an example of the truth of our text in our *perceiving of truth.***

How is it that error is generally so long-lived ? Why did not our fathers see the truth which to us now is so clearly visible ? How was it that witch-burning lingered so long in this country ? How was it that the Reform Bill, the abolition of slavery, free trade, municipal and other reforms were so long resisted ? How was it that machines, steam-engines, railways, and the like were so bitterly opposed ? These things we now see to be so greatly advantageous that we wonder at the opposition of our fathers. Was not one great reason of their opposition that named in our text—the eye was not single. Their eye was not singly on the common good, but also on their own private personal loss or gain, on their vested interests. And so ever, if the eye of the social and political body

were single, looking singly at the common good, the whole body would be full of light. Our social strifes and hates, divisions and confusions, our social darkness, would pass away.

In the parallel passage of our text (Luke xi. 34), our Lord in effect says : You do not see Me to be the sent of God, but an adventurer, because your eye is not single. Your eye is upon keeping your place as well as upon Me, and you therefore do not see Me as I am. Your eye is upon the marvellous ; you want signs and wonders rather than the truth, and, therefore, you have a confused notion of Me. Your eye is looking for Me to say something you want Me to say, and therefore you do not see what I am saying : you misunderstand Me altogether. Let your eye be single : put aside your prejudices, look not for this or that you fancy, but look singly for the truth, and your whole body shall be full of light.

And, brethren, are not some of us open to the rebuke? Have we the single intention to see Christ as He is? Or is there within us, we scarcely conscious of it, a desire, almost a will to see only what is agreeable to the flesh or flattering to our pride? Or do we suffer the evil within to make us look for defect in or objection to Christ, because we know if we saw Christ as He is, it would prevent us from doing certain things we now have pleasure in? Or do we come to the vision of Christ with prejudice, as that it cannot be that He is sinless, or it cannot be that He wrought miracles, or it cannot be that He is

the Son of God? With our eye thus double, can it be other than that the vision of Christ is confused? that He is without form or comeliness? Look on Jesus Christ without prejudice, without prepossession; let your mind be quite open; let thine eye be single, and thy whole body shall be full of the light of the vision of Jesus as the Christ of God and the Saviour of men.

## II.

**And our text receives illustration in the matter of religious peace.**

Pure, perfect peace; calm, deep assurance of personal salvation; the depths of our soul filled with a peace, ever unruffled, that for us there is no condemnation, that God is for us and with us, and Heaven is ours: this fills the whole body of our spiritual man with light. How many of us possess this peace? Some lack it, and trouble not. Others are troubled, confused when they ask, Have I this peace?

This peace comes by looking with single eye on Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the propitiation for our sins. We have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, through His blood. We are accepted by God for Christ's sake. Christ's death for us at once honours the divine righteousness, and reveals the divine love,



affording a ground or basis for forgiveness, which secures righteousness as well as saves the sinner. While our eye looks singly to this ground of forgiveness in Christ Jesus; while we trust in, rest on, look to that, and to that alone or singly, we have acceptance and peace. But if we look now to this ground of forgiveness in Christ, then to our feeling or to our intentions, or to our works, as a reason why we should be forgiven, our eye is double, and we are confused, we have not peace. If thine eye be single, if you look solely, absolutely solely, to Christ for salvation, thy whole body shall be full of the light of divine peace.

Or, if it meets you better, look at the matter this way : God is love ; from all eternity He is love. The coming and the death of Christ are the proof. Look singly to that eternal, infinite love of God ; rest upon that solely ; say, I am forgiven, not on the ground of my repentance, nor of my faith, nor of my feelings or experiences or purposes, though they are necessary ; but I am forgiven solely on the ground of God's eternal love, revealed to us in Jesus Christ. By my faith in that love in Jesus Christ I am justified. Even though I have as yet wrought no good work, or my good works are found wanting, I am justified by faith without works. If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, the light of religious peace.

## III.

**As a third example, we say, If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of *the light of goodness.***

If a man makes a speech or writes a book, and his eye is not single; he wants to say something, and yet fears to say it; if he tries to speak so as to keep in with both opposing parties, his speech cannot be clear, full of light. Or if a man in public work has his eye upon his private gain as well as upon the public good, which two do not always run together, his speeches will lack clearness, light, a cloud will fall upon him, people will say they don't understand, and they will drop away from him. If thine eye be double, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.

There are characters perfectly clear, full of light, quite transparent. Men know where they are and where to find them. They are understood by all. There is no question about them. They are admired, trusted, loved, and their whole body of life is full of light. Men see their light, and glorify God. There are others, who, though no charge can be made against them, though they do many things that are laudable, are yet not full of light. They do not attract and secure confidence. There is something obscure about them. You do not quite understand them. You are doubtful: they are dark. Between

these two, what makes the difference? It is the single eye. The one has a single intention, one straight purpose from which he does not deflect. His eye is fixed there—on the will of God, on that alone. He looks ever to that, and goes straight for that, so absorbed is he in his single intention that he has no thought for another. His eye is single, and his whole body is full of light, the light of goodness. Whereas the other has the evil, *i.e.*, the double eye; he seeks both the favour of God and the favour of men, or both God and mammon; or both his conscience and his vanity; and his character is double, confused, dark. If thine eye be double, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. Goodness, brethren, is simple enough, if we would be simple, *i.e.*, if we would be disinterested, if we would be one, single in purpose to please God. But to be thus single, we must will to do God's will with an energy which excludes every other competing intention. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." His eye was single, hence Christ's body of life was full of light.

#### IV.

**Once more we have in *blessedness of life* an example of our text.**

We have seen boys running after the butterfly, and, after some toil, knocking it down with their jacket. But when thus they have secured the butterfly, its beauty

is all gone, and probably its life also. So many, in much heat, rush about to knock down this beautiful wayward thing called happiness. When at length they bring it down, they find, alas! its beauty is gone, and its life well-nigh destroyed. But if, instead of seeking happiness itself directly, we, like the flowers, would just turn our faces to Heaven, live and grow in its light, looking singly to this, the doing of God's will where He has placed us, and being content, the butterfly of happiness would come all unsought, and rest upon us in all its beauty. If thine eye be single, if thou wilt forget happiness and all else in the energy of seeking solely the will of God, thy whole body shall be filled with the light of blessedness.

Such, then, is the gain of the single intention, but, says Christ, the loss of not having it is twofold. First, the whole body is full of darkness. If the physical eye be evil, diseased, the whole body is full of darkness. The hands cannot see to work, and the feet cannot see to walk. And if the inner eye be evil or blinded by double-mindedness, the understanding cannot see truth, the conscience cannot see duty, the affections cannot see love, the whole spiritual body is full of darkness.

And next, this single intention is the light that is in us by which we apprehend the light that is without. If, therefore, that light be darkness, the darkness is incurable. How great is the darkness! When through doubleness of purpose a man's moral

vision becomes, as it does, so perverted that he sees no difference between pride and propriety, between piety and vanity ; no difference between godliness and selfishness, between truth and superstition, between Christ and mammon ; when thus lack of singleness of intention, insincerity, has diseased, made evil, the one organ of beholding moral truth and spiritual things, how can the truth get into him ? What can be done ? There is literally no avenue by which the truth can approach him ; he is dark, and his darkness is impenetrable. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness !

That is truly a terrible state. And, brethren, it is the state you and I, as religiously disposed, are in danger of being in. The man frank and bold in his evil, who tells you "he'll have nothing to do with religion," his eye is not double, it is defiantly closed. Or the man totally careless, secular, worldly, has his inward eye not yet opened rather than diseased, or made evil by doubleness of purpose. Jesus Christ here is not thinking of them. He is speaking to persons who take some thought for this life, and who have some regard for religion, whose inner eye is open somewhat to religious truth. And are not we such ? Then, says Christ, we are in danger of having the double or evil eye. Clinging to the things of this life, and yet open to religious impression, striving, at almost any cost, to make a position in this world, and yet seeing in some measure the claims of truth and Christ, you are tempted to have an eye on both,

to exercise the double or evil eye. Take heed, lest ye enter into this temptation. If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!

THE TWO MASTERS

BY REV. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.





## THE TWO MASTERS

“No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”—  
MATTHEW vi. 24.

TO our English ears all suggestion of master and of slave is distasteful. We have left behind the order of society in which the recognition of owner and slave excited no feeling of indignation. No man, we say, should be owned by another ; no man can have a complete title of mastership in another. We have learnt this from Jesus Christ. His word here referring to slavery in no sense approves of that odious institution.

### I.

**Christ here assumes that man must have a master.**

There is nothing derogatory in being mastered, enslaved by some high ideal or great principle or noble aim. To be mastered by art, possessed, ruled by art, the whole being devoted and obedient to art,

is to be a Raphael or a Michael Angelo. To be mastered by music, its devotee or slave, is to be a Handel or Mozart. To be mastered by ideas is to be a Dante or Shakespeare. And to be the slave of goodness is to be the good man. The dishonour of the mastership comes in when the master is unworthy—when it is mammon, or drink, or temper, or vengeance.

But why cannot we be our own masters? We can; but then we have the worst of masters and become the meanest of slaves. Self is the most exacting, tyrannical, and cruel of masters. To serve self is to serve pride or vanity or passion, for these are the self that seeks to master us. The drunkard hiccuping that he is his own master is a sorry sight. But such are all enslaved by their passions, and protesting they are their own masters.

To have a master, then, does not mean loss of freedom and dignity. None are so free to think the truth as they who are possessed by the truth; and none are so free to do as they like as are they who like to do as they ought, because possessed by goodness. We are masters of ourselves, of our passions, of our tempers, of our faculties in the measure in which we are the servants or slaves of God. This is the glorious liberty of the children of God.

We must, then, have a master, for the very effort to be without one brings us under the power of the worst master, viz., ourself.

## II.

**We note next that our text affirms that two masters seek our service—God and mammon.**

God seeks us. Ere we could speak, his mark of ownership was placed upon us in baptism. All through our childhood, in home and Sunday school, He sought us. When we came to years of decision, He sought that we should then, as coming into possession of our life, intelligently and voluntarily surrender ourselves to Him whose we were. If we failed so to do, God has sought us all through the years. Now in the services of His Church, now in sorrow, now in sickness, now in prosperity, now in adversity, has He called unto us to return unto Him. If we have not returned, we know it is not because He has not called; we are indeed inwardly ashamed that we have not responded. Yet still God seeks us.

And the evil seeks us. Christ here mentions one of the most potent forms of evil, and the form that was much served in His day. But evil takes many forms in seeking us. Some may find it hard to credit that the black carbon and the brilliant diamond are the same substance under different forms. The evil comes as an angel of darkness seeking our service to vice or avarice or ambition, or it comes as an angel of light seeking our service to knowledge or to

art or to philanthropy without God. In either case it is the same substance of evil. The evil is particularly accommodating if we will only serve. It will oblige us with any form as long as the substance of our service is secure. It will accept the service of Lot under the form of worldliness, or of Esau under the form of frank, cheery self-indulgence, or of Saul under the form of self-will, or of Judas under the form of mammon, or of Saul of Tarsus under the form of self-righteousness. "No matter what the form," says the evil, "as long as you give me your heart, that I must have; for the rest, do as you will. I will not accept service without the heart, or I accept it in the hope that the heart will ere long be given."

We speak of God demanding entire devotedness, of rejecting service without the heart! Why, the evil, if it were possible, is even more than God inexorable in its demand for the entire service of the soul. It is never content with occasional service or with a contract to be broken at will; it will have the soul its slave, day and night, all through life and for evermore. And this service it seeks with great patience and power. Now like a flood will it burst in about the life, seeking to bear it away into captivity, and now like a gentle current will it lap pleasantly around life's vessel that it may slowly and stealthily drift it away into its power.

## III.

**Two, then, seek our service; but, in the third place, our text says, "You can serve only one."**

The reason is because each one requires entire devotedness, and their commands are diametrically opposed to each other, mutually exclusive. One says, "Repent of your sin"; the other says, "You have no sin to repent of." The one says, "Be reverent, believe"; the other says, "Be jolly, and believe nothing." The one says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness"; the other says, "Seek first the affairs of yourself and its happiness." The one says, "The main chance is character"; the other says, "The main chance is money." It is as impossible to serve these two as it is to go north and south at the same time.

But it may be said, "Surely the spiritual and the secular are not thus opposed; the one does not exclude the other." We need to distinguish here. Christ does not put in mutual opposition God and the world, the heavenly and the spiritual; He puts in sharp contrast and irreconcilable hostility the good and the evil, God and Satan. For example, Christ does not say, "Ye cannot serve God and seek a good business." He says, rather, you can. What He says is, "You cannot serve God and make a god of your business, serve mammon. You cannot

be the son of God and the slave of mammon." Or Christ does not say, "Ye cannot serve God and take and enjoy recreation." Indeed, He rather says you can. But He does say, "Ye cannot serve God and be the slave of pleasure." Or Christ does not say, "You cannot serve God and seek culture." Indeed, He would say, there is no true culture apart from the proper exercise of the religious sentiment. What Christ says is, "You cannot serve God and be absolutely devoted, as to God, to self-culture." Ye cannot serve two gods—God and mammon. Ye can serve God with that service which uses business, recreation, culture, and all else according to His will. So serving God, He makes all these things serve us. He puts the world at our feet, where it ought to be, and teaches us ever to exercise lordship over it.

Now, our Lord says you cannot serve God and mammon, for if you attempt it with any strength the result is that you end in serving one, and not only in not serving, but either hating or despising the other. If the result of the attempt be to serve mammon, then the mammon-server comes to hate God and love mammon. The supposition is that the man starts with some fear of and faith in God, which makes him at the first sensitive to the rebukes of God in his conscience. His serving of mammon, specially if riches increase, begets in him the love of mammon. Apart from what it brings, he loves the gold. This love narrows his understanding

and hardens his heart, reducing him to a hard, base creature. He may have now some fear of God, but he has no reverence. The rebukes of God given to him in his conscience and in God's word he becomes angry at. And since in many ways he feels God is opposing and sometimes actually thwarting him in his haste to be rich, he comes positively to hate the great and blessed God! Into such a pit of darkness the serving of mammon drops the soul.

Or should the attempt to serve the two issue in serving God, then the effect is that he holds to God and despises mammon. The passage does not read, as from the parallel we might expect, "loves God," but "holds to God." The soul which has attempted to serve God and mammon, though it comes to serve God, does not at the first serve Him with the passion of love; it holds to Him against temptation rather by a sense of duty. He holds to God and despises mammon. Not he "hates," as the parallelism suggests, but "despises" mammon. The mammon-worshipper cannot despise God, the All-good and the All-powerful; he hates Him. But mammon seeking to displace God adopts every despicable method. What a shameless liar is mammon, promising one thing but giving another, or keeping the promise to the ear but breaking it to the heart! What mean, contemptible tricks mammon will play! How lost to all honour is she! How she tries to dupe the soul into selling Christ for some thirty pieces of silver! They who have

been duped by mammon, when they come to their right mind, despise her, and themselves, too, for being duped by such. They hold to God and despise mammon. A most wholesome feeling is this despising of mammon. Ye cannot serve, be really devoted to, both God and mammon; if you attempt it, the end will be either you will hate the one and love the other, or else you will hold to the one and despise the other.

But many among us who attempt to serve two masters have not yet reached the extreme stage we have just expounded. It may be because they are not thorough enough. They do not attempt to serve, *i.e.*, to be entirely devoted to either God or mammon. They desire "to keep in" both with the Church and the world, both with God and mammon. They do not wish to break with either. They see no need for such terms as "loving," "hating," "despising"; they sound to them harsh, extravagant. They desire to be at peace, comfortable, on good terms all round. They have a rooted dislike to all effort or strain or enthusiasm. They attend more or less to religious exercises, and they attend more or less to worldly concerns. Their religion is a compromise, not a consecration; an adjustment of opposing interests, not a surrender to the one God and Saviour; is a policy of give and take, not an absolute devotedness to God. When religion presses they give in to it; when it does not press, they take from it and give to self or the



world. They do not *serve* either God or mammon; they pay attention to both, such as they think, perhaps unconsciously, will keep both from worrying them.

Brethren, how great the pride and audacity of this religion of compromise! We are not gods, and God Himself and other powers our servants. God is not our inferior. God is not simply one in a category of such powers as mammon. We do not stand supreme, having power to play off God against other powers and other powers against God as we sovereignly please. And all this, this religion of compromise assumes. If any are guilty of this religion of compromise, behold how you insult and deny God! how you deify sinful powers! how you exalt yourself! Behold how completely you are deceived by sin—the victim and slave of it! And repent lest a worse fate overtake you than overtakes those who attempt to serve two masters.



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# ANXIOUS CARES

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.



## ANXIOUS CARES

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow.”—MATTHEW vi. 34.

THERE is often no little difficulty caused by our Lord's repeated injunctions in this passage against “taking thought”; and the words have even been pointed to as conclusive proof against the Divine claims of Him who uttered them. No truly accredited Teacher, it has been said, could ever have taught that men are to exercise no prudence in the present, no foresight regarding the future. But the difficulty, after all, is only a superficial one. It arises from a mistranslation, or rather a change of meaning, in the word “thought.” At the time when our Authorised Version was made, “thought” meant anxious, troubled thought, and as such it was a correct translation of the original Greek word. But “thought” has no longer necessarily the idea of care or anxiety connected with it; and if we would arrive at the true meaning of our Lord's words, we must translate as in the Revised Version, “Be not anxious,” or perhaps still more strongly, “Be not over-anxious, for your life.” Jesus had no intention of inculcating

a spirit of imprudence or do-nothingness. "Work rather," for so we may fill up His teaching here from His injunctions at other times. "Work diligently and heartily. Use all the means in your power to provide for yourselves and others. Only see to it that you do not carry into your work a spirit of melancholy or fear. Be not troubled overmuch: for be well assured of this, that He who gave you life will also give you the means of supporting life."

It is to a particular class, then, that this passage in our Lord's sermon is addressed—the careworn and the anxious, those upon whom the burden of this life is pressing very sorely, and who, with to-day's wants supplied, are yet full of fears about to-morrow's. You know the men. Here is a man, hard-working and diligent, sparing no effort to earn an honest livelihood, and finding his exertions rewarded by the supply of his daily wants. But there is one dread which lies like a dark shadow across his path, robbing him of all cheerfulness, and filling his mind with uneasy apprehensions, and that is the dread of the future. He pictures to himself all sorts of imaginary ills, and his energy and foresight, in themselves so commendable, are marred by this, that he is over-anxious. How different from the man who, it may be with an even harder struggle to face, is yet cheerful and hopeful. And why? Because he has learned the great lesson of trust in his Heavenly Father. He believes that God will open up a way for him, and meanwhile knows that what is required

of him is not to fret and worry, but bravely to do his best, leaving the issue in the hands of God. That is the man who, in the true sense of the words, "takes no thought"—is not over-anxious for his life.

The injunction, as it fell from the lips of Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, was not in itself a new injunction. It had been proclaimed over and over again by many men and under many circumstances.

"Be not anxious for your life," the lovers of pleasure had cried. "Why should we? We are here to-day and away to-morrow. Let us enjoy the passing moments while we can. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

"Be not anxious for your life," the philosophers had argued. "It will do you no good if you do. You cannot overcome this world's evils: you cannot ward off impending trial. You must accept things as they come, and look forward to death as a blessed release from every trouble."

"Be not anxious for your life," said Jesus, and on His lips the old words received a new meaning and power by reason of the principle on which He rested them. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore"—and note that *therefore*—"I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink." Jesus held out before His hearers two services which were open to them—the service of God and the service of mammon. They might be the servants of God, looking up to Him as their King, their Ruler, their Father, and finding in His

will the law of their lives. Or they might be the servants of mammon, riches, that was to say, earthly power and greatness; all, in fact, that was of the world, and fixed their mind upon earthly things. Either of these two services, He reminded them, they might follow; but they could only follow one of them. If they were God's servants, it was the high privilege of their calling that they would be freed from the worry and anxiety of the world. If they were the world's servants they could not, on that very account, expect to enjoy the quietness and peace of the children of God. And then, taking for granted that all who heard Him would not fail to make the right choice, He pressed home the inevitable conclusion: "Therefore I say unto you"—the servants of God—"Be not anxious for your life."

What Jesus taught then, He is teaching still, and it may help us in realizing the full significance of His words for ourselves, if we notice the three arguments by which, in the remainder of this chapter, He supported them.

### I.

**There is what we may call the argument from  
*common sense.***

"Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?" (v. 25, R.V.). For those lives of yours, that is, you are dependent upon



God. He gave them to you. No man can come into being of himself, or of himself sustain his life for a moment. It is in God that he lives and moves and has his being. And shall God who gives the greater gift, not also give the lesser with it? Is it likely that He who endows His children with life itself will not also supply the means for sustaining life?

## II.

**There is the argument from *nature*.**

Pointing to the birds circling above their heads, Jesus bids His hearers, "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?" (v. 26, R.V.). "Of much more value," because, while they are God's creatures, you are God's children. "Of much more value," because your Father Himself has endowed you with the will and the power to work. And shall not He who feeds the birds that do not work, feed you who do?

Nor have the lilies of the field a different lesson to teach. They toil not, neither do they spin, and yet God has clothed them with a more than Solomon-like glory. "But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, *shall He* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?" (v. 30, R.V.).

The Gentiles may trouble themselves with questions as to meat, and drink, and clothing. And such questions are natural to them, for they know nothing of a Heavenly Father's love. But to those who do know of it, is there not something unmeaning in the very idea of undue worry or care? Their Father knows their needs, and to those who seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all things needful will be added.

### III.

**Finally, Jesus shows how *useless* all anxious care is.**

“Be not, therefore, anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (v. 34, R.V.).

You have nothing to do with the future. The present only is yours. Why, then, be imagining evils that may never come? Why rob yourselves of to-day's strength by vain forebodings of to-morrow's ills? It is for your daily bread that you ought to pray. It is strength for each day as it comes that is promised to you.

It is indeed one of the most merciful provisions of God's providence that the future is hidden from us, and that we are not called upon to add to present difficulties by the sure knowledge of future ones. There is no road so wearisome to walk along as the

long, straight road, the whole course of which we can see before us. But when our path is broken by windings and turnings, the very variety adds enjoyment to our walk, and in looking upon each new scene as it appears, we forget the length of the way. Let it be so with our path through life. Let us take what Sidney Smith calls "short views" of life, and, content with present duties, not add by anticipation the burden of to-morrow to the burden of to-day. It will take all our strength to bear to-morrow's trial when it comes. In the meantime we have nothing to do with it, and in imagining that we have we are only weakening ourselves for to-day. Only in "quietness and confidence" can true strength be found—a "quietness" which, amidst all that is fleeting, and changeable, and uncertain, stays itself on the eternal Rock of Ages; a "confidence" which, even amidst disappointment and trial, finds a sure and certain hope in the belief that God ordereth all things well.

"O Lord, how happy should we be,  
 If we could cast our care on Thee,  
 If we from self could rest ;  
 And feel at heart that One above,  
 In perfect wisdom, perfect love,  
 Is working for the best.

Lord, make these faithless hearts of ours  
 Such lessons learn from birds and flowers ;  
 Make them from self to cease.  
 Leave all things to a Father's will,  
 And taste, before Him lying still,  
 E'en in affliction, peace."

“In nothing be anxious; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus”  
(Philipp. iv. 6, 7. R.V.)

THE TEACHINGS OF THE  
FLOWERS

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## THE TEACHINGS OF THE FLOWERS

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin ; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”—  
MATTHEW vi. 28-30.

IT was a strange comparison, to set a common field flower against the most magnificent of the Jewish kings, and to give the preference to the flower. Christ had no great opinion of Solomon. He only mentioned him twice, and both times there was something disparaging in His reference. In His eyes Solomon represented the pride and pomp and glory of the world, its artificial display, its love of material grandeur and finery. And these things had no attractiveness for Him. It was not likely that the king who had spent thirteen years and vast treasure in building a palace for himself would be greatly admired by the Divine One who had not where to lay His head. The Queen of Sheba travelled thousands of miles to feast her eyes on the grandeur of this king ; Jesus would not have walked a thousand yards, or taken

one step, for such a sight. A field where lilies or buttercups and daisies were growing was to Him infinitely more pleasing than the glitter of royal residences and the gorgeous array of royal persons, for in the one He saw the footprints of His Father, and in the other only the vanity of man. Jesus loved flowers as He loved all pure things. He thought they were far more beautiful than kings and queens and gold of Sheba. He would have been more touched by the sight of flowers in a cottage window than we should be by an introduction to Buckingham Palace, for to Him flowers and trees white with spring blossom and waving corn fields spoke the language of God. They were God's messengers. There were sermons in them, sermons short, bright, and cheery, which the simplest minds could understand. We have often read of the poetry of flowers—how they symbolise various sentiments and affections. But Jesus saw more than poetry in them; He saw religion. He thought that men might read the heart of God in their simple beauty, and might learn from them some of the highest lessons of duty and of trust. The same lips that bade men search the Scriptures told them to consider the lilies, for the Bible and the field were of one accord in bearing witness of the Father's goodness and the eternal love.

Never mind Solomon and all his glory; do not fix your thoughts upon the great ones of the earth who move about in all their pomp and show, and



build gaudy mansions to advertise their wealth and power. If you think too much of them it breeds envy; it fills the heart with sullenness and discontent; it sets you groaning and croaking over the inequalities of the human lot. You begin to say, "Why should they have so much and we so little?" Turn your thoughts from all this vain-glory to the fields and gardens where God has spread His carpet, where He has decked the earth with ornaments as a bride adorned for her husband. There is not a jewel in the king's crown that can match a daisy, and no architect that ever lived could build a palace so beautiful as an apple tree in the full glory of spring. What if they do not belong to you, if they grow in another man's garden, and he is vain enough to call them his property! Why should you care for that if you can see them? Nothing less than a churlish wall some ten feet high can rob you of your divine right to enjoy them. I have no great wish to have these things in my hand, or displayed in choice vases on my table. When flowers are cut and plucked, they lose half their charm in my eyes; I like to see them growing and living. I look through the palings of a rich man's garden, and see the flower-bespangled beds, and I think God made them for me just as much as for him; and then all the lanes are free with their hedgerows of May blossom; and there are paths through every field where the cowslips and daisies grow; and I can walk through dingles and copses

where the violets and hyacinths and anemones are hiding themselves under the shade of wide-spreading trees ; and in seeing all these things I am as happy as a child again, and far happier than a king ; and they speak to me of the garden of God, for He has spread these things so plentifully everywhere that the poorest man may enjoy them, so plentifully that even the gutter child—the child of the slums—with half an hour's walk, can revel in them, and have an hour of Paradise. I have no envy of Solomon, or any other great rich man, when my feet are treading the soft meadow grass, and the blossom-laden branches are filling my heart with the emotion of beauty.

Consider the lilies, how they grow—the *weed* flowers, which nobody plants and nobody cares for. For Christ was not thinking of your rare flowers that are artificially produced in conservatories, your exquisite productions which are the triumph of the gardener's skill, and which fetch splendid prizes at the floricultural show. He was thinking of the flowers which the gardener has nothing to do with, which God plants and waters and cares for and makes beautiful. It is the wild flowers especially that come to us with a message from God. For without any aid of man He makes them to spring forth everywhere. There is no place on earth, except the smoky town that man has made, where flowers do not grow. They grow in the jungles which are so darkened with trees that nothing

else can flourish under their deep shadows. They grow in Iceland and Labrador, where the long, fierce winter destroys every vestige of vegetation save them. They grow on the top of Alpine mountains, where trees and fruits have no chance of existence, and where grass cannot live. They grow amid snows and glaciers and desert sand. Wherever the foot of man treads, he finds flowers. God has been there before him. There are no trees, no animal life, no human life, but there are flowers. They grow everywhere, to tell the man who may chance to behold them that there is not a spot of earth which is forgotten by the God who made him and loves him, and that everywhere in his loneliness he should find some handmark, some signature, of his Father. Moffat, the African missionary, in his hours of intense loneliness and dejection, was roused and reanimated by the sight of a flower. He had grown weary and desperate, and the sight of a flower something like what he had seen on his own Scottish land made him feel that God was in the lonely wilds of Africa just as much as in Scotland, and that no one who trusted in Him could ever be forgotten. And just as God makes beautiful flowers to grow everywhere, in the most likely and the most unlikely places, in all sorts of situations, in all sorts of climates, out of all sorts of soil, so He makes the richer flowers and graces of moral and spiritual life to spring up. Everywhere, in all sorts of situations, in all ranks

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of life, in all conditions of life, out of every social deposit, the saints of God arise. He has His chosen ones in king's palaces and in poor men's cottages, in the country and in the town, among shepherds, gardeners, students, clerks, nobles, and beggars. Everywhere the grace of God shines and matures the seeds of eternal life, and causes the flowers of a Christian life to unfold.

Never say, in your hours of discouragement and temptation, that you cannot serve God in the place where you are, that you have so many difficulties to contend against, that those around you are so wicked. Do not fear. God's flowers will grow everywhere. What can be fouler than the filth in which the water lily has her roots—the filth in which the newt and the worm wriggle? And yet what more, stainless or sunlike than the flower? I have known lads and men in workshops, surrounded by other men blaspheming, cursing, and doing all they could to degrade and brutalise them, yet they have maintained a really heroic Christian faith and walk before God. I have known girls in factories associated with others whose speech was foul, whose example was vile and utterly shameless, yet they have followed Jesus Christ with purity of soul and stainlessness of mind, brave and lovely. God can make the desert blossom as the rose. If you can find me soil on which the sun shines, yet on which no flower will grow, I will allow that there are conditions in which Christian life is impos-

sible. But there is no such soil, and there are no conditions of life in which God's grace will not be sufficient for you. He who has placed you there will help you to adorn that situation and to make it beautiful for Him.

Now when Christ said "Consider the lilies," He wanted His disciples to learn a lesson of trust, a lesson about the careful, loving Fatherhood of God. That was the main thought in His mind. He was speaking to a company of toiling, fretful, anxious men and women, worried with cares, burdened with fears and misgivings concerning the future, self-tormented and despondent because they had no real faith in God. They were just such men and women, indeed, as the majority of people are now. For man changes little in this respect. The human heart has always been troubled by anxious thoughts about the morrow, by shadows of coming evil or coming want, by the fear that God would forget or would neglect to provide. And we to-day need to be taught that old lesson, just as much as the Galilean people to whom Christ spoke so long ago. Consider the lilies, how they grow, scattered broadcast over the field, springing up by thousands on the mountain slopes—poor, neglected, wild flowers which bloom to-day, and to-morrow will have faded. Yet see how God cares for them! with what exquisite beauty He has clothed them! what wealth of love and design and grace He has poured into each delicate petal! "And if God so clothe

the grass of the field, how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith." Does not God's care for these little things rebuke our needless anxieties? We are always fearing that we are left to fight life's battle alone, that God flings us into the world endowed with certain faculties and crippled with certain weaknesses, and leaves us to do the best we can for ourselves. We are afraid that there are so many of us, and that in the vast ocean of life we are so small and insignificant that God cannot or will not watch over and love and care for us all. And Christ points us to the flowers. What are those lilies compared with the lives of His own children? They are only fragile toys, made to please men's eyes. They only live and bloom for a few days, and yet what pains He has taken to make them perfectly lovely! And can it be that He who is so careful in fashioning the children's toys can ever forget the children? Are ye not much better than the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven? Let the flowers teach you to trust His perfect goodness.

And what if you are of no account in the world, if you fill a very small place, if you have neither wealth nor honours nor learning nor special abilities, if you are just the sort of people who pass through life unnoticed save by a few relatives and near friends, though you can never be or do any great thing? Be sure that God has just as much thought

and love and care for you as He has for the greatest and most honoured life. There is not a flower in all creation more deftly and skilfully designed, more perfect in pattern, more artistic in finish, than the tiny, humble daisy. The more closely you examine it, whether with the naked eye or under a glass, the more you are impressed by its matchless beauty. So God gives His best care and His most loving thought to the lowliest of those who trust Him, and the life which walks in the humblest path and does the meanest work can be made by His grace as perfectly beautiful and divine as the life of saint or apostle whose fame is in all the earth.

Let us try to do all things great and small, all duties, all services, as God has clothed the flowers, giving to all of them the same care, finishing them all with the same beauty; and then the lowliest of our lives will be far fairer in His eyes than all the glory of Solomon.





THE NEEDLESSNESS OF ANXIETY

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## THE NEEDLESSNESS OF ANXIETY

“Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?”—  
MATTHEW vi. 31-32.

WE all know these words well. Often have we read them and been impressed by their simple beauty, and wished that it were possible to live with that freedom from care and anxiety which they suggest. Yet we never read them thoughtfully without feeling that they picture an ideal life of trust and serenity and passionless calm, which is almost unattainable by us poor mortals. Christ spoke these words to His chosen disciples: they were men who knew little of the complex conditions of modern civilisation; they were for the most part young, unmarried men, with none of those family ties which bring the burden of anxiety along with the joys of affection. Their wants were few, their food and clothing simple; a little sufficed for each day's needs. They knew nothing of the fierce competitions, and burning ambitions and rivalries, and greedy hunger for wealth and position which are the characteristic features of our time.

Would Jesus have spoken the same words to us? Ours is a much more anxious lot. Civilisation has come to us in a chariot of splendour, but with black care sitting behind it. We have more enjoyments, but far more fears; more luxuries, but far more uncertainties. It takes so much more to satisfy us that we are always in dread lest the supply should fail. Society asks of us so much before it will call us respectable, that we have to wear our lives out to come up to its demands; and fashion is such an exacting taskmaster, that those who yield to its laws make life a perpetual treadmill. We are so little esteemed if we are not wealthy; we are made to suffer in so many ways if we are poor; and we know that the battle of life will be so hard for our children unless we leave them well endowed, that it seems almost cruel to bid us take no thought. Would the Master, knowing all that we have to contend with, have said these words to us? Yes, I think He would, but with a heart brimming over with compassion, and with infinite allowance and forbearance suggested by the special difficulties of our surroundings. He, of all men, had a right to say these words: "He was poor and homeless." He knew not how and whence tomorrow's meals would come from, except that His Father would provide them. His future, as we should judge it, was dark and sorrowful. The shadow of the cross hung over it. He knew that agony and disgrace and utter humiliation were awaiting Him not far off. Burdens and coming anguish enough to

break the stoutest heart confronted Him. Yet He had no dread or anxiety. Perfect trust gave Him perfect peace. He went forward as a child might do, asking no questions, because a Father's strong hands held and guided His steps. It was in the blessed restfulness of His own experience that He spoke to His disciples, "Take no thought."

Now, I need not remind you that the words will not bear to be interpreted too exactly. We cannot put on the happy carelessness of birds or the thoughtless, light-heartedness of children. We cannot wholly forget to-morrow in the gladness and sunlight of to-day. When Christ commends trust, He does not recommend improvidence. When He bids us learn a lesson from the ravens and the lilies, He would not have us carry the analogy too far. Our life and happiness would be as brief as theirs if we made no more provision for the future than they do. The paradise of birds and flowers is not for men. What we have to learn from them is, not to live as they do, but to infer from the fact that God feeds them, how much more careful He will be of us. We are to find security in the certainty of God's providence, and not in blind disregard of the future. One of man's noblest attributes is forethought. To dispense with it is not faith, but folly—not childlike trust, but childish self-indulgence. When there is no forethought, there is no morality, no security for the family, no prosperity for the nation. Everything that a wise man does is determined by consideration of the future as well as

the present. To live for the present day alone is the vice of the profligate, the drunkard, and the atheist, and not the virtue of the Christian, and we may be sure that improvidence, whatever form it takes, or by whatever name it calls itself, finds no apology or sanction in our Lord's words. No! what our Lord warns us against is not reasonable and careful forethought, but the overwrought feeling of distrust and fear which is always fetching phantom shapes out of the future to disturb and worry the rest and joy of to-day; the anxiety which will not let us rejoice in what is, because it burdens itself with the dread of what may be. He warns us against spending too much thought upon the provision for bodily needs—giving too much care to the things which He regarded as the outside of life, striving too eagerly for that which is not necessary; and in all our all-absorbing pursuit of these things, and our feverish dread of not being well enough off, forgetting those higher things which are far more than meat and raiment.

Now, there are certain agonising seasons of life, hours of extreme darkness, when the future closes in upon us full of grim shadows, and it is almost impossible for us not to sit trembling with dubious thought of what the morrow will bring. When a man loses the partner of his life, and a group of motherless children are left on his hands; or a father dies, and a widow is left to provide for the household, with no resources except what her own energy can devise; or when the breadwinner of the house is

paralysed by sickness ; or when, after years of patient industry, the business man sees his affairs verging on disaster, and all his prospects blighted. At these times there must be anxious thought. Dark shadows from to-morrow step in like spectres, and take their seats on the hearth ; and fear of possibilities of evil creep into the heart, and gnaw at the very roots of its trust and peace ; the strongest faith cannot wholly prevent their entrance or drive them out. In these times of extremity, it is like mocking men to tell them to be fearless and confident and joyful, and to take no thought. I think that to men in such cases as this, the Saviour would have spoken almost tenderer words than He speaks here. He would hardly have rebuked them for their anxiety. He would hardly have asked them not to think of to-morrow, for, in these tragical hours of life, the most trustful heart cannot easily think of anything else. He would have asked them to lay their future at God's kindly feet, and wait until He had girdled its darkness with a golden circlet of hope and promise. But it was not to these stricken and harassed ones that Christ was speaking then. He was thinking rather of those who have no great cause for anxiety, yet make themselves anxious, whose future is not really dark, but who make it dark by their self-brooding imagination. He had in mind those who fret so much about savings and losses and possible emergencies, and possible accidents, or are so engrossed with thoughts and plans for securing larger gains and increased material

comforts, that there is no time and energy left for nobler aims and the cultivation of the higher qualities. For, wherever there is this excessive anxiety about the means of living, life itself is impoverished, the greater questions are thrust into sad neglect. The heart which should lift itself up to God is chained down to the wheels of common drudgery; the low-thoughted care, about which poets have spoken, crowds out all pure and more exalted emotion, shuts the soul up in the cramped region of selfish interests, strangles its sympathies, makes it blind to eternal beauties and truth, and renders its very religion a mechanical and commercial thing with no wider outlook than its own gain. This is what the Master seeks to save us from. Remember how much more life is than meat, and the body than raiment; how much more the soul is than its material environment; how much more a man is than his possessions. He would have us bethink ourselves of our dignity and immortal worth.

He would have us exercise and cultivate our diviner faculties, and to that end would deliver us from the carking cares and absorbing worries which make the broader, higher life impossible. Then, further, one cannot help thinking that the force of the Saviour's words owed something to the fact that those to whom He addressed them were not in actual want, and perhaps never had been. If He had been speaking to hungry, half-fed people, whose daily life was an endless struggle to keep the wolf from the



door, He would surely have spoken differently. When men are in this case, when they have often known what it was to want a meal, when their faces show a famished look, or when their children are crying for bread, and there is none to give them ; hard and cruel would be the lips that would tell them not to take thought about meat and clothing. Where there is pinching necessity, nothing else can be thought of. But Christ was not speaking to men in this condition, nor does He address such words to men in this condition now. He intends them for those who have had constant proofs of the Heavenly Father's care, and have been so uniformly provided for in the past that they have no occasion to distrust the future. It is Shakespeare who speaks of man as a creature who looks before and behind. It would be easier for him to look before if he were more careful to look behind. If we would only thankfully remember how God has led us through the years past, we should feel secure concerning the years that remain. Some of the most anxious and fretful of men are those who have had least to discourage them in the past. How often the shadow of care, in its gloomiest forms, darkens the homes which have been always prosperous, which sickness has visited rarely, and in which the angel of death has never dropped his wings. There is the temper of self-worry and distrust, the fear of losing what they have, the dread of not gaining more ; a sort of prevalent suspicion of God. Ah, this is the most torturing and the most needless

form of unbelief. Why should we be in dread of that which we have never experienced? Why should we think that God, after all His past goodness, is going to turn round upon us and change the whole character of his dealings? He has not been faithful all these years only to prove treacherous at the last. "Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of." It is not likely that He will withhold these things from you.

The testimony of the old Psalmist was, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." And the whole volume of our experience points in the same direction. They are cast down, but not destroyed; reduced sometimes, but never ruined. The cup of mercies runs 'short, but never sinks to the dregs. There is always the drop of oil left in the cruse which God's loving-kindness will lengthen out until the time of plenty returns. That is the worst that can come, though there is little probability that with any of you it will even come to that. But even should it come to that, nothing will fail but the luxuries and shows of life; only its smaller ambitions and its superfluities: none of the things which are indispensable to life's well-being, none of the things which make for love and goodness and the heart's best qualities and God's reward. The great Father will see that His trustful children never lack these.

O, brethren, our faith is little worth if it does not

relieve the future of its alarms, and give us some measure of quiet confidence ; if it does not raise us a little above the common worries and vexations of an unbelieving world. Surely we ought to walk through the shadows and uncertainties of life with firmer tread and more joyful aspect than those who have never knelt at the Father's feet and felt His good hand upon them. It is not for the children to doubt the Providence which feeds the ravens. The hand which never forgets to fling out the morning portion to the birds is not likely to be unmindful of the baby in the cot or the little ones around the fireside. "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"



# SEEKING THE KINGDOM

BY REV. PRINCIPAL D. ROWLANDS, B.A.



## SEEKING THE KINGDOM

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—  
MATTHEW vi. 33.

THERE are very few who do not profess to admire the Sermon on the Mount. The principles which it sets forth are so simple, and yet so profound; so plain, and yet so lofty; so fresh, and yet so true, that they command the ready homage of every unbiassed mind. He in whose soul these noble utterances find no response is a man of distorted manhood—a man of enfeebled intellect, or of blunted moral perceptions. But with all this confessed admiration of these grand precepts, there is still a lurking but a very general feeling that they are hardly adapted for the present state of the world; that they might work well enough in a perfect world, but not at all in a world like this, which is so full of corruption, rivalries, and contentions; that even high-principled men are so situated that they must perforce stoop to the questionable practices of the world in pure self-

defence, however much they may deplore it. Such, it seems to me, is the prevalent impression. Take, for instance, this precept, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." A very fine principle, you say; the man who would do this must be a wonderful character. But surely it would never do; he would never prosper; he would soon become bankrupt. Again, here is the text, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness." Ah! you say, but the concerns of this life must be attended to; we must toil for our daily bread; as far as we can see, the hand of the diligent maketh rich, while your improvident man, who careth not for the morrow, generally comes to poverty.

But I think, after all, that these golden precepts were not intended simply to elevate our notions of morality, were not intended to remain mere ideas, but were intended to guide our conduct in everyday life. They are all practicable, fitted for us even at present, and our highest welfare depends upon the use we make of them. Take the first instance quoted. Would it not be better in the majority of cases—if not in all cases—to act upon the principle enunciated here? What does that man gain who has a liking for lawsuits? He does not gain in money in the long run; and even if he should gain in money, he also gains hatred, sorrow, anxiety, and evils innumerable. Again, look at the text. The more you meditate upon it, the more



reasonable does it appear. The deeper you study it, the more clearly you perceive its profound wisdom. It declares a principle which you cannot set aside without imperilling your present peace and future prospects.

The Kingdom of God was a theme which possessed a peculiar fascination for every true-born Israelite. For ages it had fired the imagination of prophets, who descanted in the loftiest strains of poetry upon the untold glories with which it was to be accompanied. But long before our Lord's advent it had been emptied of its essential grandeur by those who gave it a mere earthly habitation, and dissociated it from the unseen, spiritual, eternal world, where it was to find its final realisation. True, the Kingdom of God is here, but its permanent home is in the great hereafter. You may become a subject of it in this life, but only as the means of fitting you for the life to come.

Let us now inquire into the meaning of the text. It evidently relates to the object which we ought to secure in life. Of course, every man sets before him some object or another; but these objects vary according to men's views and inclinations. These varied objects, however, generally agree in one particular—they are all temporal; they all pertain to the passing hour; they are all concerned with the inferior parts of our nature. We need not speak of the spendthrift or the miser, the man of pleasure or the man of wealth. It requires no

argument to prove that the man who rushes headlong into excesses, and thinks of nothing else than gratifying his appetites, lives for the present; or that the man who heaps up riches which he can neither touch nor enjoy, is devoted to the temporal. But there are other men who do this; men whose lives seem to be within the bounds of propriety, and yet have no higher object in life than to provide for the body. It is against this kind of worldliness that our Lord's sayings at the end of this chapter are especially directed. He shows—

1. *That it is impossible to secure more than one great end in life.*

“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Life is short, human powers are limited—facts which in themselves forbid our securing many objects. Seek present advantages, and you may get them; but then you will lose your soul. Seek your soul's safety, and you must be content to make present advantages of secondary importance.

2. *That it betrays a distrust in God's Providence to be over-anxious about the present life.*

“Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” The God who has given life, will He not support it? The God who has created the body, will He not clothe it? He feeds the ravens: how much more man! He clothes the

lily : how much more His children ! The question of food and clothing should not, therefore, cause us too much anxiety.

3. *That it is perfectly useless for us to worry ourselves over-much about our worldly condition.*

“Who of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?” No amount of thought and care and anxiety can make a man taller than the Creator has intended him to be ; and no amount of toil or wisdom on our part can give us worldly prosperity, apart from God’s blessing.

Hence our Lord argues that it is unworthy of His disciples to be ever asking, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” Such questions the heathen—the Gentiles—may ask with consistency ; but surely a Christian ought to be above all this. He believes in God ; in His wisdom, knowledge, and constant care for him ; and besides, he lives not merely for time, but also for eternity.

Our Lord concludes His argument in the words of the text, “But seek ye first,” etc. These words contain a deep truth, which we shall do well to endeavour to comprehend. They show us that it ought to be our chief aim in this life to prepare ourselves for the life which is to come ; and they show, moreover, that by preparing ourselves for the life to come we shall most effectually make this world our own. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”—that is, prepare for eternity—“and all these things

shall be added unto you"—that is, your present necessities will be amply provided for.

THE TRUE AIM OF LIFE, as represented in the text, is twofold.

1. *To secure citizenship in God's Kingdom.*

"But seek ye first the Kingdom of God." The human race is an apostate race. It has forfeited the favour of God through sin; it lives in active rebellion against Heaven; it hurries onward to its inevitable doom. Yet to this race the Son of God came; to save this race He suffered death; and out of this race He has purposed to create for Himself a Kingdom. And it is by securing citizenship in that Kingdom alone that man can be restored to God's favour. It follows, therefore, that the disciples of Christ are a separate people, called out of the world, consecrated for a peculiar service. From the beginning Christ declared Himself to be a King; He professed to be the founder of a new Kingdom; and for this reason was He at last condemned to die under Pontius Pilate. By many parables He endeavoured to explain to the multitudes the nature of His Kingdom. By many appeals He urged men to strive to enter into His Kingdom. By many emphatic declarations He made known that the subjects of His Kingdom would alone be blessed. To secure citizenship in this Kingdom ought surely, then, to be the great aim of life.

2. *To secure the qualifications necessary for this citizenship.*

“And His righteousness.” Indeed the citizenship itself involves the necessary qualifications for it; for without those qualifications there can be no citizenship. God’s Kingdom is very different in this respect from other kingdoms. You may, in this world, transfer your loyalty from one king to another; you may cease to be the subject of one kingdom, and become the subject of another, without there having taken place any change in your character. Not so with regard to God’s Kingdom. To become a subject of this you must become a new man, must have a new heart, must possess a new life. Without this your citizenship will be a mere name, which can secure no real advantage.

“And His *righteousness*.” This is the one qualification mentioned in the text as giving title to citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. You must be made righteous; that is, you must be pardoned and justified through Christ Jesus. You must be made righteous; that is, you must have righteousness implanted in your heart. “The Kingdom of God is within you,” was our Lord’s express declaration on one occasion. There were many who said of the Kingdom of God, “Lo here, and lo there”; but our Lord wished to impress upon them that His Kingdom must have a place in the heart; it is not an outward show, but an inward principle, which leaves its impress upon the very soul. Wonderful arrangement!—the Kingdom in us and we in the Kingdom!—the heart of each individual subject a miniature of the great Kingdom

which embraces all! "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness." Those, therefore, who possess this righteousness here, have the Kingdom in their own souls; and hereafter, in the world to come, they will enjoy all the blessedness which citizenship in God's Kingdom is meant to secure.

"*Righteousness.*" The Christian is known by his unworldly principles; by his love of everything that is honourable, just, and true; by his constant longing for the beauty of holiness.

Such, therefore, ought to be the great aim of life—to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. But then the question presents itself, Is this doing justice with this life? Is this compatible with earthly prosperity? Do we not thus sacrifice present happiness? But in reply the text distinctly declares, in reference to the good things of this life, "And all these shall be added unto you"; and we might add, "unto you *only.*" Here we get at the deep meaning of the text, and catch a glimpse of the connection between this world and the next, and perceive how impossible it is to possess the one truly without possessing the other also.

It is a common error to suppose that those who live entirely for this world do get what they seek, do enjoy the world in the highest sense, though they forfeit their hope of future bliss. No mistake can be greater than this. The man who lives for this world alone fails to secure that which is his chief

desire. He hunts after pleasures, enjoyments, possessions which continually elude his grasp. I speak no mystery, but a fact which is well known to all; that is, to all who have paid the least attention to men and their pursuits. Think of the man of pleasure. Do we not know men who have given themselves up to pleasure, and have by so doing ruined those very powers which make pleasure enjoyable? Is there a more wretched object in the world than the worn-out devotee of sensuality? Think of the mere money-maker. Do we not know men who have devoted their best days, their highest powers, their whole souls, to hoard up money? They have succeeded; but the money is not theirs, they cannot touch it, they cannot enjoy it, it can bring them no lasting comfort. Think of the lover of men's praise. Do we not know men who have made it their business to please the crowd, who have coveted popularity as the chief good, but whom the world has found out and despised for their pains? Ah! my friends, if you sacrifice your manhood, honour, truth, integrity, those principles which constitute the true nobility of man, it matters not what you may gain, for you are, after all, poor; the real treasures of life can never be your own.

“And *all these things* shall be added unto you.” Know, then, that the one qualification necessary to enjoy the world aright is citizenship in God's Kingdom. We know men who are considered poor, but their poverty is but the semblance of poverty; “as

poor, and yet possessing all things." We know men who endure affliction, and they consider affliction a boon, "working in them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Mark how the Bible invariably speaks of God's people; it seems unwilling to admit that they are poor in any sense. It says that those who sacrifice for Christ here shall receive a hundred-fold in this world, and in the world to come eternal life. It says that godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and that which is to come. It says to believers, "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: *all* are yours." If you are possessed of a pure heart, a noble nature, a Christ-like character, you can never be poor. These things are a fortune in themselves, and the only real fortune. They make their possessor supremely blessed in this world; for he knows that he is doing his Father's will, and is under his Father's care.

The text is a message to us; it appeals to us no less than it did to those disciples who first listened to it. "Seek ye first," etc. What does it mean?

1. *Seek righteousness before expediency.*

The question which is too often asked by men is this: What is the most expedient? What is attended by the least number of difficulties? What is the most prudent? What, in short, is the best policy? Whereas the inquiry should be, What is right, noble,



true? What is well-pleasing in the sight of God? Indeed, we are all of us sorely tempted to err in this direction. It was thus that Christ Himself was tempted of the devil in the wilderness. He was hungry, and was tempted to convert the stones to bread. It would have been the most expedient course; but then it would not have been right, for it would have manifested want of trust in God. He was tempted likewise to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and to worship Satan; but He thought only of what was right, and hence He triumphed in the hour of temptation. When we are thus tempted, let us look unto Jesus, so that we may triumph also. No pain which the world can inflict ought to induce us to betray truth; no reward which the world can offer ought to make us sacrifice honour. Let us say of the wrong, We cannot do it, however great its promises. Let us say of the right, We must do it, whatever may be the consequences. While we do this, we may rest assured that we are accomplishing God's will, and that no real evil can ever befall us.

2. *Seek the spiritual before the material.*

You possess two natures, you are connected with two worlds—the material and the spiritual. You are willing to admit the superiority of the spiritual over the material: it is a truth which you have been told times without number, a truth which you fancy that you believe. And yet how often is this truth ignored and forgotten in practice! Worldliness is simply another name for the preference shown to the

material; for such is the general tendency of the world. Men think and act as if they had no spiritual nature at all. The world's education consists in cultivating the intellect only as far as it is necessary to secure this life's comforts, in cultivating the affections only in reference to material things. Let me, then, impress upon you that you have a spiritual nature which needs cultivating, developing, elevating. To neglect this is to commit spiritual suicide, to sacrifice eternal joys, to court eternal death.

3. *Seek the glory of God before the advancement of self.*

Men study self, self-interest, self-respect, self-glory; and while preoccupied with self they are prone to forget their connection with God and the universe. Selfishness is the characteristic of a purely worldly character; a worldling can scarcely rise higher than this. And indeed many carry their selfishness into their religion; they profess Christ simply with the view of benefiting themselves. How mistaken! Seek first the glory of God, "the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." Know that it is by renouncing self only you can inherit the Kingdom; it is by glorifying God you can secure your own glory; it is by benefiting others you can be truly blessed.

THE DAY AND ITS DUTY

BY REV. J. MORGAN GIBBON



## THE DAY AND ITS DUTY

“Be not, therefore, anxious for the morrow : for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”—MATTHEW vi. 34.

THIS is a hard saying. To us of the prosaic Western world it carries the sound of a challenge. It dares us to make sense of it. It seems utterly incompatible with the conditions of life. But its apparent extravagance ought to put us on our guard. We may not understand it at a glance. Deep things are never comprehended in that easy fashion. We may be sure that there is sense deep and wide in this saying. In taking it up we need above all things sincerity and courage. Sometimes, it is true, we fall into the danger of seeing too much in a text. But a more pressing danger in reading our Lord's sayings is the peril of conceding too little practical and urgent meaning to His precepts. Our exposition takes the line of the least resistance. As men brick up a grate to economise fuel, we are tempted to brick up the large sayings of Jesus lest they prove too expensive for our besetting sins and favoured weaknesses.

But now, if reverently, sincerely, and courageously we take up this saying, what do we find?

## I.

**A face-meaning that is plainly impossible.**

To apply this literally to the affairs of life would be to traverse the plain law of God as revealed in the constitution of the world, in human reason, and in the pages of Scripture. Nature has arranged our world on the plan of mutual interdependence. All things hang together. Zone ministers to zone. Climate depends on climate. Season co-operates with season. To-day is not complete in itself. It is not a rounded whole. It is an item of a series. One note in a great score. Its roots lie in all the yesterdays of the past. Its full fruition must be sought in all the morrows treasured up in the heart of the sun.

The spring is a fragment. The other pieces are summer, autumn, and winter. Each depends on all and all on each.

So it is, wherever we look. Youth is an instalment. But life is a whole, and to live wisely we must see life steadily, and see it whole. This day will not end when the clock strikes twelve to-night.

“Our past still travels with us from afar,  
And what we have been makes us what we are.”

We shall meet this day again very often in the future. It will ban or bless us, accordingly as we use it. Nor

will to-morrow begin when the clock strikes. It has begun already—long, long ago. Something of its character, of its possibilities, of its value, was determined by us in long-forgotten yesterdays.

Men *must* look ahead. The business man, the teacher, the politician, the wage-earner, must take thought for the morrow. Youth, if it is wise, will take counsel with its own manhood. The boy of sixteen will confer with the man of thirty. The boy is the man's fate. The man is the old man's destiny. Goethe told us to be true to the dreams of our youth. Good; but let youth also consider the needs of the man that waits yonder in the thirties. "Remember *now* thy Creator."

Thus the face-meaning of the text cannot in the nature of the case be intended. It is impossible that Jesus should prohibit prudence and foresight in the affairs of life.

## II.

**Perhaps he meant to dissuade us against *over-anxiety*.**

Worry, though I venture to doubt it, is said to kill more than work. But whichever is the more fatal, work or worry, there can be no doubt that over-anxiety is a great evil. "Don't worry" is good advice. "In nothing be anxious."

But *here*, weighted with all the solemn emphasis

that Jesus gives it, lit up with illustration after illustration, fenced in with grave warnings, it seems to give but a poor, tame, flat sense. The whole passage has led us to expect something more than a mere "Don't worry" maxim as the close.

Nor are the illustrations any longer convincing. If the service of mammon be no more than being very careful about earthly things, even to the point of being often worried about them, Martha stands forth to prove that it is possible in this sense to serve God and mammon. She was not, perhaps, as good and bright a disciple as Mary. But she was not an idolater. Then the birds,—they are no longer in place in this passage. For they are not examples of *moderated* anxiety, but of absolute freedom from care. We must even part with the flowers. A flower is not a type of qualified care, but of the entire absence of it. "They toil not, neither do they spin." No; although "Don't worry" is good counsel, it evidently is not Christ's meaning here, or, at any rate, is a very small part of His meaning, which was, when we read His words in the light of time and place, to set forth boldly and clearly *the temper of discipleship*.

### III.

The need of the hour was not crowds of mildly-interested, non-committal adherents, but of a few souls ready to follow whithersoever He led. The act of putting forth the new religion on the world



was fraught with danger to all concerned. Only men so convinced of its truth and value as to be absolutely reckless of all earthly consequences to themselves could be of service at this time. Jesus wanted heroes. If these men trusted Him only up to a point, if there was *any* limit to their loyalty, then He was not their Master in the sense He sought to be. The faith He needed now was a life-and-death faith—a faith reckless of consequence as that of the youths of Dura, careless as the birds of Heaven, and meeting the threats of the world with the impervious

“Calm of mute, insensate things.”

So only could Christianity be launched on these seas of Time. And while the circumstances have greatly changed, this is still the temper of Christian discipleship. The average man is a good soul. But a follower of the Christ is something more.

“White shall not neutralise black ; nor good  
Compensate bad in man. Absolve him so :  
Life’s business being just *the terrible choice.*”

Yes ; the terrible choice ! Christianity still means “faithful unto death.” Of course there is a bad carelessness bred of sloth, vice, and drunkenness—the “don’t-care” of unbelief and sin. But there is also a sublime carelessness. When some one warned Robertson of Brighton that his boldness was making trouble for him in high quarters, he answered, “I

don't care."—"But, Mr Robertson, do you know what 'Don't Care' came to?"—"Yes; they crucified Him on Calvary." There is no serious piety, no great character, no strong manhood, possible, unless there is, deep in the heart, something of that tremendous and sublime carelessness.

"No heart is pure that is not passionate. The virtue that is not enthusiastic is not safe." An honest man is one who, if the worst come to the worst, is reckless of what happens. Else he is a thief already in soul. If a man is truthful only when truth is profitable and safe, he is already a liar in heart. The true man is one who in this matter takes no thought for the morrow. Let the heavens fall to-morrow, truth is truth!

When President Roosevelt came to power so unexpectedly, through the deplorable assassination of Mr M'Kinley, many prophesied trouble in the States. The new President was known for an impetuous, somewhat reckless man. Ah, yes! but his is not the irrational recklessness of the selfish fool, but the calculated recklessness of the best men. His note is, as it has always been, "I had rather be right than be President"; and America feels very safe and pardonably proud in his keeping.

On the other hand, a distinguished Japanese statesman noted recently as the very worst symptom of his own people the absence of generous enthusiasm among them. He deplored the fact that Japan no longer worshipped the ideal, or had any appreciation

of spiritual values, for, after all, it *is* true that neither a man nor a nation can live by bread alone.

Jesus, then, wished no disturbance of the ordinary conditions of life. But He asked, and He asks still, that our devotion to the right be passionate, entire, and without reserve. With regard to many things—most, indeed—I must look ahead and consider. My attitude and action wait to a large extent on circumstances. But my loyalty to Jesus Christ must pay no tribute to time or chance. That must be a settled thing, come what may. And as I cannot foresee the future, nor discover the details of to-morrow's duty, my only wisdom is to do the present duty, leaving consequences to God. To the soldier,

“That hour is regal when he mounts on guard.”

To-morrow will have evils of its own, and for those evils there will be new leadings and new grace. But to-day is royal. We are on guard to-day. We see to-day's task. We have to-day's grace at hand. Let us dare do what is right this one day. Let us have courage for this hour, this moment. We may, of course, misread the duty of the *day*; we may act unwisely. But a soldier's mistake is one thing; a traitor's crime, a coward's flight, are different things. But “To-day, if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts”; say not “We must wait the progress of events”; dare do what is right at this moment; have the courage of the hour. It is easy to imagine ourselves doing great exploits in the

picturesque past. It is easy even to promise that we will do great things in the distant future. Meanwhile, here is to-day, with its evils and its clear duty to fight them. Perhaps if I strike at these evils to-day, I shall wake up to-morrow to find that I have made an enemy of some influential body of men—that I have lost a client, a customer, a colleague, a rich member of the church. Well, I don't want to make enemies; I don't want to lose these supporters; but as between them and this clear duty, I must be absolutely reckless. That fear of to-morrow would make me a slave of mammon. I would be a servant of Jesus Christ. I must therefore obey His present orders. I must do what is right *now*.

“ Though love repine and reason chafe,  
There comes a voice without reply :  
‘Tis man's perdition to be safe,  
When for the truth he ought to die.’ ”

JUDGE NOT

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.



## JUDGE NOT

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,” etc.—MATTHEW vii. 1-6.

IT is not easy to discover any definite connecting link between this section of the sermon and the one immediately preceding it. And the reason is, that the link is missing. The different paragraphs in this seventh chapter read more like a collection of detached sayings than as parts of an ordered discourse. We shall do best, therefore, to consider each of them separately, and on its own merits, without seeking artificially to root it in the context. And as to the passage immediately before us, if it is connected with any part of the sermon, it is with that at the end of the fifth chapter. There, you will remember, we had Christ's repeal of the Mosaic law of retaliation, and a broad indication that men were to do to others, not as they were done by, but as they would be done by. And here we have a further extension of the same principle. True to His doctrine of the inwardness of all right conduct, Jesus legislates, not merely for our actions, but for our thoughts. Our criticism

of one another is to be regulated on the same terms as are our open and manifest dealings. Our charity is to think no evil. If we are to do as we would be done by, we must think as we would be thought of.

As we have already noted, the moral standard of Jesus has as much, if not more, to do with the unseen life of motive, intention, and impression, as with deeds and words. "Judge not, that ye be not judged," etc. The word "judge" here really means "condemnation." The reference is not to the mere passing of an opinion upon the conduct of others, which is often as necessary as it is innocent, but rather to censorious and uncharitable criticism. What Jesus condemns is the Pharisaic spirit of infallibility which sets itself up as the one standard of judgment, and finds something wrong in all that does not conform to it. We come back once more to our old friend, the Pharisee, and find ourselves warned, not only against his outward actions and demeanour, but against the whole spirit and temper, which makes him what he is. Still, we must not evade the lesson to ourselves here, by throwing stones at the Pharisee. We are as much in need of the solemn command, "Judge not," as ever he was, and the spirit of consideration for one another rather than of condemnation, is still sadly to seek amongst us.

I do not propose to dwell on the manifestations of this censorious spirit in the ordinary conditions of daily life. There, common though it is, it is sufficiently objectionable to meet with its deserts. There are



few more fruitful causes of pain and misery than rash and cruel judging of one another. For us, however, it will be more profitable to refer to the operation of the same spirit in religious matters, where it has the least right to be, and where it is most open to the censure of Christ. For instance, is it not the case that most of our religious differences are maintained by, if not based upon, this very spirit of criticism which Jesus Christ so unhesitatingly condemns. The sublime scorn with which the average modern Anglican regards his dissenting brethren, a scorn born of sentiment rather than of conviction or knowledge, has in it surely very little of the mild and beautiful charity of Jesus Christ. The glorious infallibility of the Plymouth Brother, who alone is worthy to bear the vessels of the Lord, and who refuses to break bread with any that are not dyed the same hue as himself, is a strange comment on the words, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." The singular rarity of Christian charity, the disposition to condemn all those who have not had exactly the same religious experiences as ourselves, or who cannot express their experiences in the forms which best suit us, the fatal craving for uniformity which hangs over Christendom like a cloud bursting ever and anon into dread thunder and scorching fire, the serene self-appreciation which so often makes us utterly unfit to appreciate others—all these things should show us how pertinent and timely are the words of Jesus before us. You will tell me, how-

ever, that many of our religious differences have a very serious and solid basis, and spring out of a profound conviction, and that it is neither possible nor natural for us to regard lightly those causes and professions for which our fathers fought, and suffered, and died. And I perfectly agree. The only thing I contend for is that we have no business to suffer our convictions, however profound or sincere, to cause us to look uncharitably upon other men. If we would obtain credit for what we ourselves truly believe, let us give the same credit to others. The cause of Christ and His Kingdom is suffering immeasurably to-day from the bitterness of men's religious judgments. It is not only that their own natures are warped and spoiled thereby, and their religion turned into a farce, but the work of the one Master is incredibly hindered and thwarted by the folly of those who all call themselves His disciples. The spectacle which Christendom presents to-day is one to make angels weep and devils laugh, and is due primarily to the carping, unkindly spirit, which will not suffer Christians even to agree to differ.

But we must not allow ourselves here to be content with mere denunciation. There is a positive tone and spirit behind these words of Jesus, which we are bound to take into account. He is Himself the best comment upon His command, "Judge not." His eye was quicker to see the good in a man than the evil, the points of agreement with one's self rather than those of difference. His attitude to the world

around Him in its ignorance, prejudice, open and flagrant sin, was one of tenderest pity and forbearance, rather than of blame. "I came not to judge the world." His treatment of those who differed from, and who openly persecuted Him, who scorned His teaching and opposed His works, was patient in the extreme, and a lasting example to those called by His name.

To outcast and sinner, to heretic and unbeliever, in whom the seed of eternal life was almost smothered and dead, He came as the radiant sunshine, quickening into new and larger life. Alas that His followers should so often come to the same, as harsh frost and scorching blight, extinguishing for ever the little life that is there. And in our treatment of Christians who are not as we are, we need to remember the Master's rebuke to His disciples, "He that is not against us is on our part." We need to see good in those who differ from us, rather than evil, and to beware of judging rashly those who are not as we. It is an excellent thing to be such good Christians as we are, but there are, and always will be, followers of Christ who are imperfect and immature, and it is for us to teach, and cherish, and strengthen them, and not to drive them off in a spirit of self-righteous pride. You say, perhaps, that you will not join the Christian Church because it contains persons who, you think, are not true Christians at all: who, you say, are hard, selfish, worldly, cold, and dead. But who are you that condemn them? and do you not

know that in condemning them you most bitterly and truly condemn yourself? In holding aloof from them, you cut yourself off from Christ's own self, and pillory yourself, by your own confession, as having no part or lot in His spirit or in His charity. And it is the same if you refuse to have union and communion with other orders of Christians than your own. Whoever they are, and called by whatever name, so long as they seek to follow Christ, however mistakenly and at howsoever great a distance, they are on His side and not against Him, and you yourself can say no more. What was good enough for the Master is good enough for the disciple, and a man is no good disciple of Jesus Christ until he has learned, not only to refrain from judging others, but to treat all in the spirit of human charity, patience, and kindness, that the Master Himself showed. For, says Jesus, you will be judged as you judge, "with what judgment ye judge," etc.

This does not mean, of course, that a man will get judgment for judging—like for like in any exact or literal fashion. It rather implies that a man has to earn the right to judge at all, has always to ask himself the question, Who art thou that judgest? We can all very easily see the mote in our brother's eye, the little painful quality or action that seems to us to call aloud for reproof, and from which we are ourselves so singularly free. And yet we have to beware lest in our attention to it we overlook a far uglier fault in ourselves, the uncharitable view

which we take of our brother. Indeed, the teaching of Jesus here just comes to this, that the only person we have any right at all to criticise is ourselves. We have most of us quite enough to do in clearing our own spiritual vision, in setting right our own lives, in obeying the divine law ourselves before we come to criticise other people. I admit that if we are free, it is not for us to say so. It seems true that the warning of Jesus here is largely used in order to draw attention again to the need for self-culture and self-discipline, of which so much is said in this Sermon on the Mount. The place which most of us assign to this in the cycle of Christian duties is by no means what it ought to be. We must take heed unto ourselves if we would become fit instruments for the raising and uplifting of others. And here, surely, is the function and office of the Christian Church—not to be a home merely of those who are already made perfect in their own esteem, and therefore so critical of all who are not as they are effectually to bar them out of the fold; but rather should the Church be a training ground for those who are only called to be saints and seeking to make their calling and election sure. There is need to take great care lest in applying perfectly legitimate tests as conditions of entrance into God's visible Church on earth we show ourselves too critical, and act contrary to the spirit of Christ. Just as a school is not a place for the learned alone, nor a hospital for the healthy, so a Church is not a place only for

those who count themselves to be saints. We should say, rather, that the Church is the place for sinners—if they have come to hate their sin and are striving to escape its power. The Church is a place, not only for people who are good, but for those who are trying to be good—for returning and repentant prodigals as well as for the elder brethren. And so there is no room therein for any spirit of carping criticism, but only for the broadest and fullest charity. We need a Church which is catholic in equipment and spirit, as well as in name, wherein saints and elect souls are no Pharisees gathering their robes about them in proud self-righteousness, lest they be contaminated by the passing crowd of sinners, but where they hold out hands of welcome to the outcast and the penitent, where men judge only themselves, and leave their brethren to the tenderer mercies of the living God. It is only such a Church which exemplifies the forbearing, forgiving spirit of Jesus Christ that is a worthy representative of God's Kingdom on earth.

And so, says Jesus, continuing, "Give not that which is holy to dogs," etc., etc. These words are at once a limitation and an extension of the foregoing. They are, perhaps, among the most difficult in the whole sermon, but taken in close relation with their context, they have their meaning and convey a lesson of their own. It seems, indeed, as though they go right in the face of what has just been said; surely we judge with very heavy judgment

if we are to set down some men as no better than dogs or swine. This, however, is not quite a fair criticism. In deprecating judgment, Jesus allows for the exercise of a judicial spirit. After all, men are not all the same, and cannot be treated as such. The reference is, of course, to presenting the word of the Kingdom, either by preaching or in conduct. There are men so low in the scale of living and humanity that they will angrily and rudely reject the divinest truth, and trample it under feet, as dogs or pigs would pearls, in brutish ignorance of what they are doing. And it is here that the difficulty of the passage comes in. What, then, is to be done? Are we to suffer the conduct of these scorers of the light to be their own condemnation, and leave them in their ignorance and folly? Are there some people so degraded as that the gospel is not to be preached to them at all? That is the surface meaning of the words of Jesus, and so they are generally interpreted. Dogs and swine are not worthy of your pearls, and have no use for them; therefore, keep them to yourselves. Many men will be found to show themselves utterly impervious to the Divine word—then leave them to perish in their stubbornness. I confess I am very reluctant to accept this bald explanation, inconsistent as it is with so much else in the four Gospels. And I do not believe that we are bound up to any such harsh conclusion.

Jesus is teaching the disciples that they are to

condemn no man, not even those who are utterly debased, ignorant, and degraded. But if we are not to condemn them, what are we to do? The question is no sooner asked than that we see the answer—implied in the very words which give rise to it. There is here a whole theory of the Christian creed, and of the presentation of the word of God. It is only another way of saying, "Feed men with food convenient for them." Dogs and swine will reject your pearls, for they have no use for them; feed them with what they can receive and eat. And the men and women to whom we would give the pearls of God's truth must be dealt with in the same way. If they cannot receive the glorious news of the Gospel, do not let that be their condemnation; rather make it ground for truer judgment and a wiser method. Give them something that they can understand. Do not so persistently set before them the holiest and most beautiful of Divine truths till you create disgust and scorn, and they trample truth under foot, and turn and rend. Feed babes with milk. The words form a grand argument for educational missions, which, by patient sowing of seed, by diligence and watching and slow degrees, would prepare heathen people for the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So the words form a grand argument against dogmatic teaching in Day schools; they warn us to give to the child mind only such religious truths as the child mind can grasp, and not offend



and disgust the little ones by setting before them truths which they cannot understand, and so turn religion into ridicule, and cause them to trample it under feet. Yes; and the same applies to the teaching in Sunday schools. There the children are neither older nor wiser than on other days of the week, and there, too, babes must be fed with milk. The Churches have laid up for themselves, and are laying up, terrible condemnation by the unwisdom of their Sunday school methods. If you would lead boys and girls to Christ, it will not be through the mazes of your own doctrinal position. You cannot make them just as you are, mature Christians. You must stoop to meet them, put on childish things once more, tell them only what they are able to bear, as Christ did to His disciples; refuse to lay upon their tender souls a burden of theology which you can hardly carry yourself. Otherwise you will sadly miss your mark; you will create a distaste for religion rather than a love for it. Truths which are pearls to you will often be but dross to your pupils, and they will just trample them under their feet, and harden their hearts. There is here a lesson of sanity in method and tender discrimination of charity, which all Christian teachers would do well to learn.



REFORMING BUSYBODIES

BY REV. THOMAS G. SELBY



## REFORMING BUSYBODIES

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”—MATTHEW vii. 3-5.

THE Old Testament Scriptures are unsparing in their condemnation of the man who goes forth to preach a morality he does not observe in his own life. Neither his parade of good intentions nor the duties of an assumed office can excuse his flagrant inconsistency. God on high scorns the pretender who urges upon others a law which he himself neglects. “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, and that thou hast taken my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee?” Such an advocacy of the Divine law schools men into formalism and hypocrisy, and angers the God of eternal truth.

And when this inconsistent busybody gets to work to cure our imperfections, we feel how suitable is the condemnation God has passed upon him. If we are humble we shall be accessible to rebuke and correc-

tion ; but we have every right to claim that the man who sets himself to amend our shortcomings shall be transparent in character, and a sincere follower of the perfection he seeks to impose upon us. Said the Psalmist, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness ; let him reprove me, and it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." But there are self-constituted healers whose services we cannot welcome, and whom we do well to keep at arm's length. It can only aggravate our infirmity if one, whose moral drawbacks exceed our own, sets himself to overhaul our conduct and to remove the blemishes he finds there. The Master's teaching is that the rectification of others must begin in honest, thorough-going self-rectification.

THESE MEMORABLE WORDS ABOUT MOTES AND BEAMS, DUST-GRAINS AND SPLINTERS, SEEM TO IMPLY THAT THERE ARE GRAVE AND LESS GRAVE SINS, OFFENCES WHICH ARE FLAGRANT AND OFFENCES WHICH ARE VENIAL, CULPABLE IMPERFECTIONS AND IMPERFECTIONS WHICH ARE COMPARATIVELY TRIVIAL. Are we justified in assuming this? Was it not one of the aims of this great discourse to put inward upon the same footing as outward sin, and to show that not a few things in which men excuse themselves, are terribly reprehensible in the sight of God? Did not an inspired follower of the Lord state it as an axiom that "he who offended in one point was guilty of all"? It is obvious that in every form of sin there is a principle

of rebellious selfishness ; yet the extent to which that principle may have rooted itself in the individual varies. The Master himself did not speak in the same note of rebuke to all ; sometimes the rebuke was almost hidden in the pure, warm pity which coursed like life-blood through his speech.

In these words Jesus had in view *the wide distinction between moral transgression and lapses from the Jewish standard of discipline and ritual perfection.* Again and again in the course of His ministry Jesus had to point out that the Pharisees made a superb virtue of trifling observances, whilst they neglected the great essentials of goodness and spiritual truth. For generations they had put the stress of an undue emphasis upon the secondary precepts of the law ; and were all the time proud, spiteful, avaricious, eager for worldly recognition. Any doubt of their infallibility was treason against God ; and yet they persistently ignored the inwardness which Jesus emphasised. In comparison with the ceremonial omissions they were ready to visit with the greater excommunication, their sins were really as splinters to sand-grains. The holy Jesus found less moral attraction in their society than in that of many men whom they looked upon as grievous rebels against God and the institutions of the theocracy. Outcasts often showed a truer appreciation of Jesus and His mission of mercy than Scribes and Pharisees, and were nearer the Kingdom. Some sins obscure the spiritual judgment more fatally than other sins, and hopelessly

unfit men for a vocation of help towards their kind.

The blemishes which mar character may have *diverse degrees of culpability in different classes and in individuals of unequal opportunity*. Some men have had a special providential training which ought to issue in commensurate enlightenment and excellence of life, whilst others lack such advantages. The official instructor of his contemporaries is placed under peculiar obligation to maintain a high standard of temper and conduct ; and when he fails his breakdown has elements of shameful lack in the faults of the man who fills an obscure place in life. All delinquencies in one who sets himself to correct the shortcomings of his neighbours have a guiltier hue than cleaves to the frailties of the shrinking soul who feels himself unworthy to rebuke and reform his fellow-citizens. He who has been trained and disciplined to note fine distinctions of right and wrong, is more blameworthy when he forgets them than the novice who blunders in his rude, conventional applications of the precepts of righteousness. - St Paul reminds the Jew who judges others that he unconsciously lays down the law by which he himself will be judged, for he admits its sanctions and shows himself an expert in its theories. Perhaps in his word there is an echo from the counsel of the Sermon on the Mount, "Judge not that ye be not judged." The man who can see the mote in his brother's eye whilst there is an ugly splinter in his own shows



that his discernments are above the average, although he lacks courage to repair his own defects. Some of our innocent field flowers become acrid and poisonous in the warmer climates of the South. And the fault, which may be comparatively innocuous in the person through whose life light filters meagrely, may be virulent in the person whose life is informed with ample knowledge and fervent religious impulse.

*Sins may vary in their seriousness according to the stages of development they have reached.* There are ailments belonging to the moral childhood which pass away, leaving comparatively little mischief behind; and there are ailments belonging to maturity and old age, from which recovery is more difficult. The elasticity and recuperative power of a fresh and unworn spiritual life prevail against some imperfections which tend to become fixed and final in those who have lost the secret of growth. In the advance towards perfection there are blemishes which disappear slowly; but the outlook is dark indeed when the obliquities which ought to have disappeared at the beginning of the spiritual history obtrude themselves to the end. The inward sins of these sleek, grey-headed leaders of the people, their avarice, their harshness and acerbity, their lack of broad-minded sympathy, their eagerness for public appreciation, their habit of putting themselves forward as little less than objects of worship, were offences of unqualified flagrancy. With unsleeping cunning they covered up their own transgressions as

though they themselves had been made of fine clay, in which no flaw could possibly reveal itself; and they hunted down the impulsive sins of the friendless and the unclassed, as though such sins involved a guilt from which they had always kept themselves. Jesus would not admit the distinction; and if distinction were to be made at all, it should be in favour of those who, bad though they might have been in the past, acknowledged their offences. The new prophet reversed fashionable judgments, and treated the man who set himself up to superintend the conscience and direct the life of a fellow-sinner as having the greater sin. The spiritual disability of such a pretender was as a big splinter wounding the eye, whilst the man towards whom he bore himself as a supercilious and judicial busybody had the lighter disability symbolised by the dust-grain.

When a man reserves the search-light of his discriminations for the failings of neighbours, and shuts off its play from his personal shortcomings, HE BRINGS HIS OWN MOTIVES INTO SUSPICION. At the core he is a hard egoist, who wishes to assert his own virtue at the cost of another's disparagement. The imperfections which detract from his own character are impudently minimised and kept in the background, whilst the infirmities by which the victim of his criticism may be hampered are exaggerated and thrust into uncharitable prominence. Self-complacency has warped and coloured his judgment from the root upwards. This classic similitude

of the judgment passed by splinters upon dust-grains, expresses with life-like accuracy the partiality and perverseness of human nature. If ten men have each broken some one or other of the ten commandments, each man will probably be found to declare that the particular commandment he has broken was the least essential of the series; whilst the commandment broken by his neighbour was the most vital to the well-being of the world. The position of the nine remaining transgressors is far more serious than his own. Most of us have pet sins, and personal idiosyncrasy imports into the Divine law curious glosses and differentiating shades alien to its original texture. Motes may be serious, but the beam to which our eye offers a lodging is nothing at all. In the very act of handling the errors of others, we show ourselves not only fussy incompetents, but thorough-paced Pharisees. Envy and pride rather than holy goodwill animates the ministry of the man with the splinter to the sufferer from a dust-grain, for he is more anxious to call attention to the fault than to remove it; or, if to remove it, to magnify his skill and piety by the feat. The eye usually rids itself of motes through its own fine, self-regulating mechanisms, and the man whose fault is of the tiny dimension indicated in this metaphor, is on the highway to salvation, and needs no officious pharisaic surgery; whilst the man with a beam or an arrow-shaft in his eye, is in mortal jeopardy, and requires help rather than the other.

*What sanctimonious insolence for one who has*

*condemning blots upon his own existing character, to press upon another counsels of correction and improvement!* Such an affectation of goodwill is a thinly-disguised assertion of superiority which deceives no one. It is not benign and gracious healing, but aggressive, provoking egotism, which shows itself in every aspect of the experiment. Pride is never so offensive as when it parades itself in the guise of a specious benevolence, and the patient upon whom these effusive efforts at healing are bestowed is irritated, without receiving compensating benefit or relief. The only authority a man can have in setting himself to rectify the errors of a neighbour is the authority of a meek and blameless spirit, in which the work of self-rectification has been effectually consummated. It is often said that even genuine professors of religion irritate the neighbours to whom they would fain do good, and stir them up to chronic irritation and protest. Perhaps this is true, and to some extent inevitable. To save men from the less noble self which is in them, it may be necessary to ruffle their sensibilities; but the ruffling is sometimes greatly in excess of that which is required by the necessities of the case. Good and sincere people often mix their just enterprises of reform with methods and mannerisms which excite needless prejudice. But when allowance has been made for all these things, it must be admitted that the acute and enduring irritation of the world against the Church is too often caused

by the ill-timed and incongruous officiousness of imperfect people, who imagine they have a vocation to put right those who are as good, and perhaps even better, than themselves. The reformer of plausible tongue and speckled habits of life cannot fail to provoke and incense. Far too much of the current prejudice against religion is caused by the effort of the man with the beam in his eye to doctor the eye which is only fretted by a passing mote.

The offer of the reforming busybody to dislodge the mote gives no promise of relief, because *he is either ignorant of the science which heals, or is too timid and careless to apply its principles in his own life*. He is zealous to prove upon others methods that for some undeclared reason he does not follow. His smooth and gracious invitation looks like a scheme for making a neighbour's eye the field for fine theory and heartless experiment. Who would not resent such perilous officiousness, however loud the pretensions of this self-constituted physician? Such a proposal only evokes misgiving, and can have but one issue — suffering and aggravated mischief. Perhaps the mote is imaginary after all, and the speck is due to an aberration of vision from which the man with the splinter suffers. He who preaches either the law or the gospel with the qualification, "Attend to my instructions, and leave the question of my example alone," excites just contempt. All sin distorts the judgment, and an unreclaimed sinner cannot have the discernment

necessary to save his fellow-sinner. The highest service he can do is to keep hands off, and let him go his own gait. The eye of either body or soul is a wonderfully delicate organ, needing for the correction of its ailments a fine manipulation and a subtle equipment, of which a maimed busybody is not likely to be the possessor. As well ask the one-eyed striker at a village smithy to adjust the hair-spring of a watch with iron tongs. Such an incident would cause laughter in common life, but, alas! is not unknown in the sphere of ethics. In the broadly-drawn metaphor of the text, our Master suggests that the saved man is the only competent saviour of others, and that our first task, if we aspire to reform society, is to seek and find deliverance from all that disfigures the conduct and disables the faculties.

The Church has too often proved itself slow to accept the rebuke contained in these memorable words. It has failed to improve the society in the midst of which it has been founded, because it has been zealous to magnify its office, and too self-satisfied to recognise its own failings and seek for itself a law of higher perfection. These verses in the great sermon get close home to the roots of vital and present-day questions.

ARE CHURCH ORDERS HISTORIC OR MORAL IN THEIR BASIS, AND IN THEIR METHODS OF VERIFICATION? Has a Church with a degraded ethical standard—a Church represented by a profligate and

incestuous head like Alexander the Sixth, or by a refined Pagan, like Leo the Tenth, who patronised Art and secretly scoffed at the mysteries of the Christian faith—a Church dominated by time-serving and self-indulgent leaders—the right and authority to heal soul-sickness in the name of Jesus, to direct the conscience of the penitent, and to claim for its work a monopoly of the Divine approval? All candid and accurate historians recognise the fact that there have been periods when the Church was corrupt, priests living in concubinage and drunkenness, and extending indulgence to the crimes of kings and rulers; whilst the sincerely pious were few, mean in station, and powerless voices crying in the wilderness. Are sacramental prerogatives independent of personal character? Does not the power to constitute a valid Gospel ministry lapse in a Church ruled by unholy men? Such a Church can only recover authority for the cure of souls by hearty and unreserved penitence, and, so long as it continues in obduracy and unwashed guilt, cannot either do the work of its own generation or transmit real authority to those who will have to do the work of succeeding generations. It asks submission to a specious religious prestige, whilst that prestige is discredited by slackness, vice, intrigue, and notorious turpitude. Living in sin itself, it seeks to cast out the motes of schism, imperfect sacramental grace, and debatable heresies out of the eyes

of those who observe the cardinal Christian moralities with a more scrupulous care and zeal than its own sons. Whatever authority Jesus Christ may have given to His apostles, He did not, at least, go back upon His own doctrine by giving authority to appoint the man with the beam in his eye to be a minister to the man momentarily vexed by a trivial dust-grain.

*This supercilious and incongruous concern with the moral perfecting of others may sometimes be shown by those who are the sworn opponents of priestcraft and all its ways.* In Churches which are not directed by conclaves of Popes, Prelates, and Cardinals, there is a temptation to think more of office than of character, and to assume that the sanction for a cure of souls rests upon prerogative rather than upon saintly and unselfish conduct. The governing coteries of some religious communions contain a larger proportion of *bon vivants* than is quite seemly, and the man who can lift a glass of wine to the light and squint at it with the eye of a connoisseur, is now and again singularly acute in seeing the mote in his brother's eye. O how the principalities and powers shake their heads over the heresies of men who hold the moral rather than the clerical view of the pastoral office, and whose lives, perhaps, are stricter and more strenuous than their own! They are so charitable to the misdemeanours of their friends; but wholesome criticism of themselves and their ways they try to depict as an offence of



*lèse majesté.* The violence of the democracy they denounce, but are zealous to whitewash the piracies carried on under the flag of their country, and the industrial wars made by the rich upon the poor. They sometimes go to conventions called together to make men perfect, and connive at the political and ecclesiastical disfranchisement of men with whom they do not see eye to eye, and think they are acting to the glory of God. There must be a higher personal perfection in the religious chieftains of the Churches if the world is to submit its spiritual ailments to their treatment.

BUT IN THE WORLD WE CAN FIND MORE GLARING ILLUSTRATIONS OF THIS ANOMALY THAN IN THE CHURCH. Ought a clever politician, of bad private record, to make or amend laws safeguarding the community against those evils which drain its moral health and sap its true prosperity? Is not the motive of legislation to repress crime, and abate those more flagrant forms of selfishness which war against the public peace and well-being? Can there be any kind of competence for this task in the man whose life-history has been one of perverted moral discernment? May the splinter cast out the dust-grain, even though the splinter may chance to be of cedar or sandal-wood? Ought the administration of the law to be entrusted at any time to men who are not patterns of both public and private virtue? If judges and magistrates are not so good as they might be, their work on

the bench will not prove an unmixed blessing. When the sword of justice is in dirty hands, it is an open question whether the justice is as great a blessing to society as the dirt is a curse. The upper class alcoholic sometimes black-lists the alcoholic of the streets, and the only difference between the man on the bench and the man in the dock is that the one can afford to cab it home after a night with his friends, and the other cannot. The director of an unsound company, who puts his signature to a dubious balance-sheet, will often give the heaviest sentence within his power to a hungry thief, and the anomaly does not make for edifying. A magistrate, in upholding the technicalities of the law, will sometimes hector an unwitting offender, whose shoes he is not worthy to untie. The law has its technicalities, which must be kept in mind, but he who is set to administer a technical law ought at least to be the moral equal of the man whose action he censures. Codes of both private and official etiquette are sometimes promulgated with appalling solemnity by functionaries who would laugh to scorn the idea that there is any connection between morals and manners. The splinter ought never to cast out the mote, even though his warrant for the performance is the King's commission.

A few months ago a clergyman and social reformer gave a table of the sporting prophecies and the results, in reference to six horse races which had just

been held. Omitting the prognostications of the sporting papers, seven influential London newspapers had ventured upon forty-three prophecies, only two of which had turned out right. Papers which take part in this kind of imposture practised upon the ignorant and the poor, forfeit all right to speak upon moral and religious questions. And yet some of these papers instruct Nonconformists how to behave, scoff at the traditions of the Puritans, tell ministers of religion what the pulpit ought to be, and pass strictures upon the policy of the martyred missionaries of China, and upon the life and work of devoted men and women in various parts of the world. The moral and religious articles in these papers are written by one set of men, and the sporting prophecies by another ; but a paper is supposed to be united under one management, and has an entity of its own ; and I, for one, refuse to accept any kind of direction from papers vitiated by this notorious scandal. The splinter has no right to speak about the dust-grains in the eyes of the man in the pulpit or of the Christian Churches.

CHRISTIAN NATIONS CANNOT ALWAYS BE HELD GUILTLESS OF THIS INCONSISTENT ATTITUDE IN DEALING WITH SURROUNDING NATIONS. We promise to mitigate the poverty of the world by the blessings of our extended commerce, and sections of the population in our chief cities live below the poverty line, and die in the workhouse. We rightly extend the protection of our influence to the mission-

ary of glad tidings in other lands, but not infrequently we thrust our traditions upon independent states, and paralyse established tribunals which are not greatly inferior to our own. Under the pretext of bestowing liberty and equal rights, we carry our flag into new territories, and lo! sweating, slavery, and induced labour flourish there like weeds. We propose to tax the Kaffir for his polygamies, and relieve the white man's shoulders of his burden; but no one thinks of a double income-tax for certain men in both Houses of Parliament, in comparison with whom the Kaffir polygamist is respectable. We are ready to preach a crusade against the barbarities of black men and others, when the Rothschilds will allow us, but are reticent about the atrocities of a neighbouring power, which is supposed to bear the Christian name. We are against the liquor trade with native races, and every philanthropist must rejoice in the favour shown to the movement by any Government whatsoever; but we put into the House of Lords men whose trade debauches and decimates our white, English-speaking brothers and sisters, and make the licensed victuallers the darlings of our peculiar care. We preach the golden rule, and carry on a sordid monopoly in a debasing drug which is the worst foe the Far East has to fear. The campaign of the Allies against the Boxers is being in part paid for by the moral deterioration, and, in some cases, by the lives of large sections of the Chinese people. An American writer, familiar with diplomatic life in Peking, and not un-

favourable to his British kinsmen, has written, "Probably enough has been said of the part played by 'the leading Christian Power of the world,' in forcing this horrible curse upon the Chinese nation, for the sake of the enormous revenue derived from the traffic. It is humiliating to any one who has English blood in his veins to recall the facts, and to discover that the British Government is loudest and most imperative in the demand for reforms, whilst that Government is, in the main, alone responsible for fastening a vice upon China, which renders any reform difficult to the verge of impossibility."

Of course it is the Christian people who want to cast out evil from Chinese life, and diplomatists and officials, Christian only in name, who do the other thing; but the two conflicting policies record themselves in the acts of the same Government, and put upon our imperial professions the mark of an absurd, pernicious, and wicked incongruity. Unless we can bring up our international dealings to the level of the name, we ought to disavow the collective use of the Christian name, and use it only as private individuals. We shall not heal the woes of the Gentile world till we rectify the policies of Christendom. To moralise our international trade is the most important of all missionary enterprises. It would be a greater gain than quadrupling our agencies. Why cannot we cleanse and heal the non-Christian millions of the world? Because the splinter in Western religion has

been trying to remove the mote of the Confucianist and the Hindoo.

In this section of His teaching, *Jesus is not releasing religious men from the obligation to rebuke rampant sin and press on the reformation of manners.* It is no fatalistic acquiescence in an evil world of splinters, dust-grains, and moral ophthalmia, that He is intending to preach. The offences of both the individual and of the society to which he belongs, must be removed. But all legitimate rebuke of the errors of others must begin with self-knowledge and unflinching, conscientious self-rectification. It is through the neglect of this first condition that rebuke fails, and the practice of it tends to become obsolete. The man who, under any circumstances, protests against current wrong-doing, will become the butt of angry, voracious criticism, and may often be tempted to turn aside from the thorny path of fidelity. The sin of our brother must not be glozed over; but there must be order, propriety, tenderness, and clear insight in grappling with the grave issues it raises. Splinters and motes are inconvenient and pernicious things, contributing in nowise to the health and comfort of those who are afflicted with them. When the Master denounced the men who, in his own language of hyperbole, "strained at the gnat and swallowed the camel," he did not wish to hint that either gnats or camels were nutritious, and fit for daily food. They were both to be got rid of; but some sense of order and proportion was necessary in

the process. The outlook of Jesus was optimistic, and he was no friend to chronic defect and obliquity. He did not believe in a world where men's eyes were stabbed by splinters and inflamed by dust-grains, and pain and disability were parts of a stereotyped and inevitable order. He did not stop with this delightful bit of satire. Evils, big and little alike, evils in ourselves, and in our neighbours, can be cured. But we shall get to work in a different spirit, by improved methods, and with far better results when our own moral blemishes are removed. A Church in which offence and discreditable inconsistency prevail, is unequal to the task of amending a world, some of whose citizens live up to higher standards of honour and integrity than many professors of religion. The half-blind oculist will prove no benefactor to those upon whom he experiments. "Then shalt thou see clearly." The clue to the tragic problem of popular irreligion does not lie far away from us. If we could cure our own pretence, insincerity and make-believe, the non-churchgoing populations around us would flow into the synagogues to be healed. Those only who have been purified in spirit and in life have a true understanding of human nature, and are able to help it against its characteristic infirmities.

The Great Teacher Himself acted up to the letter and spirit of His own rule, and could meet His adversaries with the intrepid challenge, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" He set out to teach and

reform His generation, only when He had thirty blameless and unimpeachable years, spent amidst the common irritations of life, behind Him. He gave the utmost care to keep Himself free even from trifling motes. He obeyed a ritual which was shortly to pass away, and Himself set the example of submission to the requirements of a Church which as yet was undeveloped and unformulated. He presented Himself in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, visited the temple at the great festivals, and sent the cleansed lepers to offer the prescribed oblations, and get their credentials from the appointed guardians of the national health. He kept the Passover with His disciples, and rose to the highest standards of Old Testament righteousness. No mote of slurred or neglected ritual ever disqualified Him from His work as a reformer. The young man who had kept all the commandments from his childhood upwards, recognised, in the person of the poor wandering prophet, One significantly better than himself. Jesus Christ reached the highest level of ritual and spiritual completeness, and that became His indefeasible title to correct and reform the world.



ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



## ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

“Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ; for every one that asketh receiveth,” etc.—MATTHEW vii. 7.

THIS may be called the charter of the praying soul. It is the passport which our Master gives us to the presence chamber of the great King. It is the promise and pledge signed by His own hand that whatever petitions we carry there will be accepted, considered, and graciously answered. It is given in an absolute fashion. There are no exceptions and no qualifications. “Ask, and ye shall receive ; for every one that asketh receiveth.” The Master must have meant that not a single prayer is offered in vain, that the Heavenly Father never turns us back with a blank negative ; that every request which faith presses is answered with some free and generous giving. Yes, His words are too plain and positive to admit of any other meaning. And yet that does not seem to be at all in accord with our experience ; prayer is often terribly disappointing. Some of you used to pray regularly and earnestly, and with unquestioning faith, too, believing that God would surely

grant you the thing that you desired ; and then you gave it up, having come to the conclusion that there was nothing in it, that your prayers were so much spent breath, yielding no results. And others, who still continue to pray, are somewhat dubious about the value of it, and hardly expect to have their petitions granted. And all of us, indeed, could tell of a hundred or a thousand things which we have asked of God in vain. Some have been entreating Him for years to give them one longed-for boon, and they are waiting for it apparently unanswered yet. Evidently we do not get what we ask, and we do not always find what we seek. Was the Saviour mistaken then ? or did He purposely delude us with false hopes when he uttered these beautiful words ? No ! the very mention of such a thing is irreverent, if not blasphemous. He knew what He was saying, and meant it all. But what did He mean ? Let us try in a very feeble and imperfect way to suggest the answer.

## I.

**God's giving is always wiser than our asking.**

**"Ask, and ye shall receive."**

The promise is final and complete. We always receive, but not always what we ask. The end of prayer, if it be true prayer, is not to get our every wish gratified, but to get our real needs supplied.

There is a vast difference between what we want and what we wish. They are often as much opposed to each other as light and darkness. We always know what we wish, but we do not always know what we want. God only fully knows that. A sick child is perfectly sure what he would like, and sometimes asks for fifty things which would aggravate the disease, or prove fatal. The child's wiser nurse knows what the child wants, and endeavours to provide that. It would be a strange world if every one could get from God just what he asked. It would make the world a fool's paradise for a day, and an asylum of idiots on all subsequent days. Prayer would be the greatest curse instead of the highest human privilege if it secured us all that we desired. God loves us too well to make Himself the servant of our whims. He compassionates our ignorance too much to let our ignorance override His wisdom. We are nowhere told that He will grant just what we ask. You pray for prosperity in business — you may not get it; you pray for wealth; you pray for the recovery of a sick friend or child; you pray for the removal of a cross or burden; you pray that you may be successful in some love suit, or may be in some lawsuit, and your wish is not gratified. What then! does the promise fail? "Ask, and you shall receive." No; for you do receive. Not that particular thing; but, if you go on praying, always something better. God invariably gives, though not invariably what you have set your

heart upon. If a man asks for bread, God will not give him a stone. And if he asks for a stone, God will still give him, not a stone, but bread. St Paul prayed three times that his thorn in the flesh might be removed. It was not removed; but the answer came nevertheless. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Grace came, and strength and patience, and the very thorn was blessed in making him fitter for his work. Our Lord Himself prayed, "Let this cup pass from Me." The cup did not pass from Him, so far as we can see. He had still to drink it. Yet the prayer was answered most fully and sweetly; there was given to Him a perfect willingness to drink the cup. Angels came and strengthened Him. And His next cry, "Thy will be done," proved what complete fortitude and peace of mind He had received. His Father had not given what He asked, but something better. Earnest prayer never fails, though it seems to fail. If the answer is not shaped according to your idea, it is shaped after a diviner pattern. It is above all that you can ask or think. It is always true. "Ask, and ye shall receive."

## II.

### God's gifts yield to persistency.

Our Lord here repeats the same promise in three forms, though, as we shall see in a moment, it is not quite the same promise. We are to ask for it. We

are to go on seeking for it until we find it. We are to knock at the door, nay, almost force the door. The earnestness expressed in these three words is an augmenting force : the pressure gathers volume as it goes on. We are to take the Kingdom of God by violence if we cannot get it by gentler means. Our Lord does not guarantee to us anything at first asking. God does not open His treasury to a passing bugle call or the tap of a careless hand which just touches the door and then hurries on. Prayer is not a momentary wish, or a transitory whim. It is the utterance of a confirmed and persistent and unwearying longing. If you want a prayer answered, you must go on praying. God wants to prove whether you are intent upon it. The Gospel story is filled with examples of the sort of prayer which God yields to. The importunate widow prevails ; the men who break through the house-roof get the blessing ; the blind men who go on crying for mercy until Jesus is nearly out of sight, receive the boon ; the friend who has retired to rest gets up and gives the loaves to the neighbour who keeps on knocking : the Saviour yields to the almost impudent persistency of the Syro-Phœnician woman. These are human pictures of God's way with His children. If you would have any great thing from God—the conversion of a child, power over some besetting sin, light in some difficulty or darkness, you must ask for it until you are almost weary of asking for it—ask for it as if you would tire God out. He gets nothing who takes a

first refusal ; for God knows even better than we know that he who is content to ask once or twice and not again, is not much set on having, nor will he prize it if he obtains. The Great Father keeps us waiting often because it is good for us to come often to His feet. Every time we come, we touch Him and receive some virtue, though that one thing is still withheld. "Pray without ceasing ; ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

### III.

**This threefold command, with the corresponding threefold promise, was intended to emphasise pressure and continuance in prayer.**

But surely that was not all. These sayings are not mere iteration—the same thing presented in three ways. They represent three distinct aspects—sometimes three distinct stages of the life of faith. The first is easy—ask and receive. It represents the passive, receptive stage. It is what we call the sweet beginning—the very babyhood of the Christian life. The first step that we take towards God and Heaven is just asking and receiving. It needs no seeking, striving, labour, and earnest knocking to gain from God that which puts us in the way of salvation. Salvation, as we truly say, is of grace—it is God's free gift. It is neither



bought, nor fought for, nor got by determined effort. It is given, and we just receive it. No effort can secure you forgiveness, acceptance—the sense of God's love. No effort can give you conversion—the new heart, the changing power of the Holy Ghost. No effort can make you love God and set your hearts on doing His will. You receive all that when you truly and earnestly ask for it. He gives you the changed nature; He gives you pardon; He gives you power to become sons of God; He brings you into His Kingdom of Light, simply in answer to your childlike, believing asking. Ask and you shall receive—that is how the blessed work begins. But if you think it stops there, your Christian lives will be sadly disappointing; they will bring no fruit unto perfection. That is only the babyhood of faith. Alas! there are some who seem never to get beyond that babyhood. They say, "Is not salvation a free gift? And have we not received it? What more is needed, then?" There is incomparably more needed! There is a long further stage indicated by the Saviour's second word, "Seek, and ye shall find." This is the picture of a hidden treasure, which cannot be discovered by the mere asking. It is only to be got by constant, patient, and unwearying searching. The woman lighting a candle and sweeping every corner of the house, and sparing no toil until she has found the lost coin—that is something like what you see in the second word.

The new life is God's free gift, but the fruits of the new life only come to those who resolutely and perseveringly seek, strive, and pray for them. You get the infinite grace and love of God by simply asking; but you do not get Christlikeness of character in that way. Christlikeness has to be sought. Not without effort do we win one sweet grace of disposition, or one beautiful quality in the Christian life. God does not deliver you from one weakness or evil tendency, or from the power of one besetting sin, without your own urgent help. You have to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, though God, in a sense, has already given you salvation. You have to hunger for every bit of righteousness that you win; you have to pant and strive and labour for all the real power that is given to you. Nay! all the influence which you have over others, all the fitness for service, all the ability to work in Christ's vineyard, and save other souls for Him, have to be gained by earnest labour, incessant self-discipline, and unwearying prayer. All that means aspiring, struggling, pressing forward. Without that, you are only useless logs in a Church; you are mere driftwood in Christ's Kingdom—nay! you are in danger of losing all that Christ has freely given you. Ask, and you shall receive—that is how it begins; and then comes the second and longer stage of persistent striving: "Seek, and ye shall find."

And the last stage is beautiful, for it means

peace—"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." You see a man coming out of the wild night and the storm, out of the turmoil and the weary tramp, out of all that has tried and vexed and harassed him on the journey. He comes at last to the sheltering house, well warmed and lighted, within which peace awaits him. And he knocks and enters. The door of rest is opened to him, and he knows no more of fear, distraction, and fighting. That is the scene which our Lord's third word brings before us. But you say, "That belongs to another life; that will not be realised until we reach our last eternal home, until the house with the many mansions opens its doors and takes us in out of life's storm." Well, perhaps it will not be completely realised until then. But part of it we may and do gain *now*. There comes to every man and woman who has laboured and prayed, and fought the good fight and put his daily trust in God—there comes, even here on earth, a sense of rest, as in a Father's house—rest like that which a child feels when held fast in strong, loving arms. We are still in the midst of a warring, turbulent world, tried by temptation, harassed by failure and disappointment, saddened by all the evil which is about us. But, withal, there is a great, sweet trust in God, which brings peace. We walk with Him; we feel that we are overshadowed by His presence, and that nothing can separate us from His love. We feel that He is everywhere

working about us, that He is carrying forward His great saving designs, and making all things work for good. We have no fear; we have no doubt. He has opened His house of rest, and we are quiet, happy, and hopeful. That is always the summit of the Christian life—to find repose in Him.

May you all have this threefold experience—  
Ask! Seek! Knock!

THE REASONABLENESS OF  
PRAYER

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.



## THE REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER

“Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.—MATTHEW vii. 7.

NO doubt many can repeat these words, but it is to be feared that comparatively few so believe them as to rest their souls on the fact of their being true. This splendid assurance is given by our Lord towards the end of His Sermon on the Mount. That sermon is singularly popular now. Men who are sceptical about the redemption of the world by Christ, and who deny the supernatural, frankly acknowledge that there is no code of ethics so noble as this, nor any which would do so much to raise humanity if it were obeyed. They more than hint that if Jesus had confined Himself to these utterances the world would readily acknowledge Him to be its greatest teacher. Yet here is a text distinctly implying the supernatural, which is part and parcel of the sermon, and which speaks of prayer as a blessed reality and an actual power. Here Christ reveals God, not as an inexorable governor, but as a gracious Father, ready to give good gifts to His children, and with a calm assurance,

which has not been shaken by the tramp of the scepticism of centuries, He says to His disciples, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Under the old dispensation there were foreshadowings of this truth. The ark, for example, stood in the Holy of Holies, and over it was a cloud—the sign of a mystery which none could penetrate : beside it were the cherubim, reminding worshippers of heavenly powers loftier than themselves ; and over it was the mercy-seat where God communed with the faithful. All this was realised in Christ, even during His earthly ministry. Sinners knelt at His feet for forgiveness ; lepers worshipping Him were cleansed ; fathers and mothers who interceded with Him had their prayers answered, sometimes in ways they did not expect. And He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," so that as God is revealed in Him, we may come with boldness to the Throne of Grace.

We must, however, see to it that prayer is such as Christ meant it to be. It is not an eager begging to have our own way, or to choose our own gifts, but a desire that higher blessings may come to ourselves and others. It is not a querulous lamentation over our needs and infirmities, but an asking for what is needful for the spiritual life ; with a hearty belief that God will give it to us. It is not a cold and formal repetition of phrases, but a pouring out of the heart before One who loves us ; and we may well pray that



the Inspirer of all true supplication may fill us not only with longing, but with expectation.

*In speaking of the reasonableness of prayer, we must note the widespread unbelief there is in its efficacy, and the fact that some who are professedly believers in Christ have a secret uneasiness in regard to its value which they dare not voice.*

Able men urge on our consideration that the world is ruled by fixed laws, that there is no room for our petitions, even though they go up from hearts broken on the wheel of destiny. They suggest that we should try experiments, say, amongst the sick in different wards of a hospital, those in the one being prayed for and those in the other not; and that then the result should be calculated as we might calculate imports and exports. They have no conception of that which is too ethereal to be handled and weighed in the balances, and decomposed by analysis, and tabulated in records; and if the fact be pointed out that the spiritual is outside the sphere of such calculation, it is met only with a smile of mockery.

*We hold, however, that before men decide on so momentous a sacrifice as to give up prayer, which has so long blessed the world with hope, we should first verify the facts of the conceptions submitted to us, that we may be satisfied we are dealing with the reality itself and not with a dark, distorted shadow of it.*

If, for example, Jesus had said, "You shall get whatever you ask for, and this may be expected by every disciple," the mockery would be

justified. But this would be really taking the control of the world out of the hands of God and placing its rule under variable and contradictory desires. Then we should have one farmer, for example, praying for rain because his crops were suffering from drought, and another praying that it might not rain because all his corn was not in ; and, according to this theory, each would get his desire—it would rain and not rain at one and the same time,—which is absurd. Surely the respect that is professed for Christ as a wise teacher should show that He could not have had such a conception of prayer in His mind, and we are convinced that it cannot be based on any teaching of our Lord's. It has been said that "Prayer is a machine warranted by theologians to make God do what His clients want." To this we reply, "Those who accept this statement do not know what they are speaking about," and in controverting this they are fighting a bogey conjured up by their own imagination, which they have substituted for the angel of comfort which has led many a saint out of the prison-house into light and liberty.

*Let us turn to Christ's own words ; let us read the text in the light of what this sermon reveals in regard to the spirit with which we should approach God.*

If we study the prayer which He gave to His disciples as an example, we find in it only one solitary request, and that was for the simplest necessary of life. "Give us this day our daily bread," and even this follows after the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come,

Thy Will be done," which implies a readiness to go without the daily bread, if only thus we could hallow God's name and make His Kingdom come. Most of the objections urged against prayer are urged against a caricature of what prayer really is. It was to the disciples, who were ready to accept the sermon as a whole, that Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive."

We do not deny that the government of God is carried on under laws which appear to be fixed and invariable, but we do deny that these laws are independent of the Divine Will. They are really assertions of His Will. God has not limited Himself by His own arrangements, any more than a wise and good father allows the rules of his household to prevent his attending to the requests of his children; and it would be an insult to our Heavenly Father if we refused to believe in His love and willingness to give what is really good. The Emperor Augustus was once approached by a petitioner in a condition of such abject fear, that the Emperor was angry, and exclaimed, "What, man, do you think you are giving a sop to an elephant?" Even he did not like to be considered by suppliants hard and cruel; and surely our Heavenly Father, who is no tyrant, who is not a blind Fate, regardless of our feelings, meant what He said to all under the guidance of His Spirit, "Ask, and ye shall receive."

*We have more reason for confidence that prayer will be answered, because prayer itself is the result of influences which God has given.*

He is a Spirit who affects our minds insidiously and yet mightily. We believe in such influences from our fellow-men, we are affected even by the silent presence of those whom we love. Much more the Father of Spirits is able to influence our thoughts. Many of the mightiest movements are caused by invisible forces. We see the tide rolling in upon the shore with resistless power, although no force is visible; but we know the moon silently and secretly is drawing the sea upward. The power is not the less because it is invisible. And there are souls drawn towards God secretly: men who have suddenly revolted under the yoke of sin which they have worn quietly for years, who find, unexpectedly to themselves, old feelings aroused which once were stirred beside their mother's knee: and some who have felt impelled to go to worship, or to avow discipleship. All of these are divinely led as Peter was when he was told to go to the house of Cornelius. It is this influence which we need, and which we may fully trust. Our Lord said, "No man can come to Me except the Father draw Him."

*It is to be observed that God answers prayer sometimes through affecting the minds of others.*

Gideon, for example, was afraid to go and meet the Midianites, at the head of only three hundred men, and he prayed over it. In answer to his prayer, it was borne in upon him that he should go to the camp, and there look and listen. He came near and heard a Midianitish soldier tell his dream to his

comrade about the barley-cake which struck and overturned a tent, and listened to this reply, "I will tell you the meaning of it. It is that Gideon will come down and overthrow us." When Gideon heard that, he was ready to return to his men, and cry, "Arise, for the Lord hath delivered them into our hands." Now the modern sceptic would probably have said to Gideon, "What is the use of praying? We cannot alter facts. Big battalions win, and must win, so that it will be wise to gather together and train a larger force." But instead of this, Gideon prayed, and God answered him. How? Not by multiplying men, nor by sending angels, but by influencing the mind of a Midianitish soldier who never knew that he gave the required explanation. None the less, the victory was given of God. Similarly in ways we do not expect, God may affect the minds of some who are distant from us or unknown to us, and in the repentance of some, and the restoration of others, we may have a fulfilment of the promise, "Ask, and ye shall receive."

"We doubt the word that tells us : Ask,  
 And ye shall have your prayer.  
 We turn our thoughts as to a task,  
 With wills constrained and rare.

And yet we have ; these scanty prayers  
 Bring gold without alloy.  
 Oh, God ! but he who trusts and dares  
 Must have a boundless joy."



“ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN”

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.





## “ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN”

“Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”—MATTHEW vii. 7-12.

IT is a wonderful promise that is contained in these words—a promise that requires no small degree of spiritual discernment to be fully understood and realised. As in the previous verses, it seems as though Jesus were harking back to a former point of the sermon. There is no very direct connection with the immediate context, but almost a repetition of his doctrine as to prayer already stated, with special reference to prayer of the purely petitionary kind. What needs chiefly to be borne in mind in regard to the passage is that it must be treated as a whole. We can obtain no sound interpretation of the mind of Jesus on any subject by isolating individual texts and resting upon them alone. Where He thought it worth His while to make many deliverances on a single topic, we may surely regard it as worth our while to take into account all that He said, and not confine our attention simply to the most

obvious, or the most startling, of His words. In the case before us, for instance, there is a lavish generosity about the first point of the passage, which is carefully toned down and brought within bounds in the second; and each of these must receive its due weight if we are to discover here the mind of Christ.

The subject before us is that commerce between earth and Heaven which is called prayer. This time, however, it is not prayer in the most general sense of the word of which Jesus speaks, but that particular kind of prayer which we call petition, which consists not in simple converse with God, but in certain definite requests which we make at His hands. And, as already suggested, the first thing Jesus has to say in regard to it is of a very general and even sweeping character. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

*There are at least two points implied here, which deserve notice, and the first is that man's dealing with God needs to be perfectly open and straightforward. There is no mystery or juggling about prayer.*

If you want a thing, ask for it. Nothing could be plainer. And your asking will not be in vain. You will receive—not, mark, just what you ask; nothing is said about that—but you will receive something; your state will be the better for your prayer. The intercourse between you and God

is absolutely free and unfettered so far as you are concerned. There is no room in the teaching of Jesus for any of those formal restrictions which we are so fond of putting on our own prayers. If you want anything from God, it is by no means necessary for you to go through a series of performances in order to obtain the boon; *you* have but to ask, and if it be the will of God, you shall have what you ask. God is no puppet to be moved by your whims; He has His own will, and acts up to it. Another implication of these words—“Ask, and it shall be given you”—is that our asking of God must be in earnest. Prayer is never a mere spasmodic effort, the result of emergencies, but a constant and steady set of the soul Godwards. The character of the words Jesus uses, and the careful repetition of them—“ask,” “seek,” “knock”—all imply a diligent and persistent exercise. At its simplest, prayer involves a discipline of our wills and a submission of ourselves to the will of God, which is by no means easy. It involves, that is, a faith which is not mere credulity, but is the uprising of the spiritual within us at the expense of our whole lower nature. Before you can even say, “Our Father,” before you can ask God for daily bread, you must have learnt that hardest of all lessons—to say “Thy will be done.” True, God does not yield to importunity for its own sake, but you must have the will, the determination, the knowledge, the enthusiasm, to be importunate, if

you would truly pray. To be filled, you must be empty; spiritual blessings only come to those who need them. You need to hunger and thirst after them.

And so, recognising this, you will be prepared for the limitations which Jesus proceeds to put upon His own words.

*Before we speak of them, however, let us understand quite clearly, once and for all, that when Jesus bids us ask of God what we need, He by no means promises that we shall receive what we ask.*

Remember, He is speaking to the disciples, to those who are supposed to practise believing prayer, to members of the Kingdom; but even to these He never promises that they have but to ask in order to receive what they ask. No doubt this is the sense which is often put upon the words, and it dominates much of the theory and practice of Christian prayer; but the doctrine is really dishonouring to God, and subversive of the faith of man. You say that God will answer the prayers of His people if they have faith, and you are right. But what is it that you mean? Is the faith of which you speak faith in God, the humble, trusting belief that He will act according to His own will and pleasure, and that, so acting, He will do the best for you? Or is it—what I fear it is often held to be—belief that He will do *your* will, if only you press it upon Him with sufficient persistence. The question is—Are we in our prayers

seeking to impose our wills upon God, or simply to bring them into harmony with His. And it is this aspect of the matter which Jesus now brings before us. “Or what man is there of you who if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone, or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent.”

Note, here, for one thing, that the whole transaction takes place on the basis of the filial relationship. In praying to God, we speak as children to a Father. In His will and knowledge and love He is as much superior to us as an ordinary father to his little children. God's purposes to us are eternal purposes of love, and until we have taken this into account we can never hope for any understanding of His ways, or any contentment with them. He will unquestionably give good things to them that ask Him. When men ask for bread and fishes, they will certainly not get stones or serpents; and if they ask for stones and serpents, mistaking these for other things, they will by no means receive them. There are parents, no doubt, who will give their children almost everything they want; but both they and their children come bitterly to rue it in the end. But most of us are wiser, and are ready to revise our little ones' requests in the light of our own larger knowledge and discretion. Under the inspiration of love we learn to say No, understanding often that it is the kindest and wisest thing that we can say. And if this is so with us, who are evil in heart, limited in vision,

beset with clouds, how much more will the Father of Lights and God of all grace refuse to answer our low and ignorant petitions, and gently turn us to better things. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them which ask Him?"

*But while we acknowledge the truth and beauty of this conception of God's providential dealings, do not let us forget that it is here revealed to us as forming the basis and regulative principle of our prayers.*

It suggests for one thing that we need to know what we ought to ask for as well as how to ask it. The discipline of life should teach us slowly to put away childish things, and attain more and more to a spirit and sentiment that are in tune with the Divine, so that we shall be more inclined to ask for those things which are well-pleasing to God. In His words to the disciples here, Jesus is not assuring them that their arbitrary requests will all be answered; he is rather suggesting that as the general bent of their desires is towards the Kingdom of Heaven, they will so be able to pray better, and God more ready to grant their requests. And so, for us, prayer must always be on the assumption that God knows better than we do, and that His answer will be far beyond our asking rather than in accordance with it. And this should cure us of the fatal habit towards which we all tend, of making prayer a condition of our receiving anything from God. We must leave room for that free

grace which is His greatest glory, and the greatest boon to us. The largest gifts we have received at God's hands have been by no means in answer to our prayers. The life which we now live in the flesh, and the new life which has come to us in Christ, these were surely of God's free bounty, and not of our asking ; and it is but sane and reverent faith that we should believe He will do as He has done. To make our poor desires and aims the measure of His dealing with us were, indeed, to cut ourselves off from Him. What God looks for in us, and answers, is rather the spirit of prayer than actual verbal petitions. We must beware of turning this holy thing into a mere fetish, and ourselves into mere praying machines. It is true that prayer is the vital means of all spiritual work and life ; but it is itself also conditional, it depends upon the filial tone and temper of the soul.

We say that prayer is the driving power in all our church machinery, but that is only because it is the index of the Spirit of God moving in and amongst the people who constitute the Church. The very essence of it is that it be spontaneous, a welling forth of the divine aspirations of the soul ; if it has to be forced or pumped up, it is foul and dead. And even upon prayer at the best God's gifts are not dependent. You need more money to bring on your work, more signs of success, and ask God to grant you these. But beware lest in so doing you virtually deny Him. I can conceive of many religious works

so wild and foolish in their methods, so utterly at variance with all the dictates of human prudence and wisdom, as that it is almost an insult to God to ask for His help and countenance. God answers prayers of faith, but certainly not those of crazy and idle credulity. His gifts are given to help men, but not to save them the trouble of helping themselves. The legitimate sphere of faith does not begin until we have exhausted every known resource, and it is then that the Divine message comes as a boon indeed, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find."

*But we have not yet done with this subject. It is impossible to discuss petitionary prayer without being brought sharp up with the previous question.*

Men have always asked themselves, and are asking themselves to-day more earnestly than ever, "Does God hear our requests for material help and blessing?" There is a general agreement that prayer is of spiritual value, the means of spiritual culture and education, and that it may really bring to men spiritual blessings. But there is very grave scepticism as to whether it can do more, as to whether it has any vocation outside the spiritual sphere. The sense of the universal reign of law, men say, forbids them to regard answers to prayer for material blessings as within the range of possibility. Such prayers seem to involve interference with the nature of things which God has fixed and ordained. This is said to be unnatural, and therefore not to be expected or desired. Now the passage



before us is a useful one, because it throws needed light upon this very common position, and teaches us that there are limitations placed upon God's action, not by any outside power or authority, or by the arbitrary or fixed order of nature, but by Himself. As we have already seen, there are prayers which He cannot grant, because He will not. And the principle which we find to be involved here we need to transfer to the relation between God and the natural world. It is here that the difficulty comes in. The difficulty is created by those who raise it when they speak of God as being outside Nature, or Nature being outside God. The question of God's relation to Nature is too great and complex to be discussed here, but this much may be said, that we are surely wrong if we speak of Him as a stranger in His own Universe. He is not outside it in any sense of the word, but within it, and expressed by it. His relation to it cannot be described as under the old figure of the watchmaker and the watch, but is rather that of the human mind to the human body. God works in the Universe, and is expressed by it, just as the mind and soul of a man find their expression in the life of the physical body. And so the laws of the Universe are not, as it were, limitations and restraints imposed upon God, but the natural and ordered action of His Will in things seen and temporal. There is, and can be, no such thing as Divine interference with the laws of Nature. God acts in and through the Universe, but always in accordance with the laws which He

has made. He cannot break its harmony and uniformity, because these are the ordered expression of His own life. As the mind works on and in the body through its physical organs, and always in accordance with the laws of their being, so God works in the Universe, which is the body or garment we see Him by. And if, in our prayers to Him, we expect anything in the shape of interference with the order He has set Himself—any supernatural breach of the Divine law, we shall be disappointed, for we know not what we ask.

But this does not forbid all prayer in the physical sphere, all asking for material blessings. May we not say that with God, as with an earthly father, one of the conditions of His action is the devout will of His children. If we cannot ask God to break His own laws, we may ask that He so administer them as to meet our special weakness or special need. We ought to do so, if in all our asking we remain strictly subordinate to His Will, if we know and remember that He sees not as we see, that the evils He sends are often blessings in disguise, and that He entertains for us a spiritual purpose that far transcends our highest thoughts of Him, and that will only be accomplished in ways that are to us mysterious and strange. It is only as we so ask that it shall be given us, as we so seek that we shall find, and as we so knock that the door shall be opened.

"All things, therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto

them.” This is rather a strange conclusion of the whole matter, and seems, at first sight, inconsequent. Really it follows very closely from the teaching of Jesus as to prayer. The argument is, that God will do to us as we do to men, therefore we should do to them as we would be done by. The relation of man to man is intimately connected with, indeed regulates, the relation of man to God, and of God to man. The reiterated demand of this Sermon on the Mount is for absolute sincerity, for purity of heart, and for singleness of purpose. And the demand is driven home by the dread reminder that our action conditions that of God to us, and that of our fellow-men. If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. If a man love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen. Do ye to others as ye would be done by. We are accustomed to admit freely, that in this command our duties to our fellows are summed up and performed. This is to us the law and the prophets. But the command receives a wider extension in the context, and we may say that religion, on its practical side, is summed up in the statement that God does to us as we ourselves do. In other words, religion is for us life. This is a truth which this Sermon on the Mount sets before us, and drives home upon us, with constant reiteration.



THE STRAIT GATE

By REV. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.



## THE STRAIT GATE

“Enter ye in at the strait gate ; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat : because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”—MATTHEW vii. 13-14.

THE difficulty of virtue, the ease of vice ; the difficulty of religion, the ease of irreligion—have ever, in all countries, impressed the mind of man. The choice of Hercules put these two paths before the Greek youth. The one a pleasant, flowery road, the unseen end of which is destruction ; the other the unalluring mountain path, steep, rugged, leading, however, to life. To the one path, the young lady, Pleasure, in gay apparel, with languishing eye and sweet voice of promise, lures ; to the other path, the grave matron, Wisdom, draped in grey, speaking words solemn and urgent, persuades. Thus, on his immortal canvas, Leonardo has pictured the choice.

When a young man, I taught in the ragged schools of London. On one Sunday I had this passage for my lesson. “I say, teacher,” merrily sang one

of those sharp, ragged boys, "it says, don't it, the way to the good is narrer and the way to the bad wide?" "Yes, it does," I replied. "I know that's true," he said, with a knowing wink; "but," he added, dropping his voice, "is it fair? Oughtn't God have made them both the same width? He'd have given us, then, a fair chance."

For the moment I was puzzled. Then I said, "Yes; you know and I know that the way to the good is narrow, but the way to the bad is broad. The Bible in that says truly. But who says that God so made these ways? The Bible does not say God made them so. The Bible simply records the fact that they are so; nothing more. The fact exists, whether the Bible records it or not. The Bible recording that the one gate is narrow and the other broad does not make them so, any more than a medical book recording smallpox makes smallpox to exist. The fact is, God has done His best to reverse these terrible facts. God has striven to make the way to the good broad, and the way to the evil narrow. God has ever, through our conscience and through the sending of good men, warned us against the bad, and entreated us to the good. At infinite cost, He sent His only-begotten Son, who, by life and death, has opened the way to the good to us, and made it as broad as it is. And God, moreover, is continually sending His Holy Spirit to strengthen us to enter into and to persevere in the good. If



God's will were done on earth as in Heaven, the way here, as there, to the good would be broad."

Who or what, then, makes the two gates so different? It is not the will of God; it is the sin of man. The evil of our own heart, our selfishness, our vanity, our not loving goodness, makes the gate to life strait. Man's injustice to man, man's inhumanity to man, narrows the way. By hardness, by provoking one another, by tempting one another, we make the gate strait. Employers make it strait to their employees; employees make it strait to their employers. Children make it strait to their parents; parents make it strait to their children. Ah! what need there is to consider one another, lest we make the gate to life even more strait than it is.

## I.

**Some of the chief things which make the gate to life strait.**

### *1. Spiritual dislike to God and His Christ.*

The gate to knowledge to one man is very strait; he simply cannot fix his mind on the matter. To another the gate is wide; he easily enters in at the gate of knowledge, and quickly travels its way, taking without difficulty its prizes. Why the difference? The knowledge is the same to both.

But the one dislikes learning; the other loves it. The gate to music is to one man very strait; he cannot squeeze through, press as he will. To another the gate is wide; he passes without an effort into the musical kingdom. The music is the same to the one as to the other; music exercises no partiality. The difference is in the person. The one loves music; the other does not.

So, brethren, it is in the main our liking, the state of our heart, that makes faith in God a gate to us strait or wide. Men love darkness rather than light. Men have a liking for error rather than for truth. Men, as a whole, naturally, more easily believe in a God of apathy than in a God of love, in a God of moral indifference than in a God of strong feeling for right and wrong. People more easily believe that there is nothing really wrong with them, than that they are smitten through and through with pride and folly. Repentance is a bitter cup to us; we do not like it. Self-complaisance is a sweet potion; we need no persuasion to drink it off. Faith! Well, it humbles us, and we would rather not; or it calls for moral effort, and we are not fond of that. But non-faith suits us well. And so to us the gate to penitence and faith, to personal religion, is strait.

This is true, but not the whole truth. There is also in man the love of truth. Some want to repent and believe, but find difficulties many—the gate strait. Even they, too, will find that the

natural dislike of the heart of things spiritual has not a little to do with their difficulties. If they think not, let them will to do His will, and they shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or not.

*2. But not only our personal dislike, but worldly influence, makes the gate to life strait.*

To worldly success the gate is strait, because usually there are so many striving to enter. For the one situation there are, how many eligible applicants? For the half-dozen good positions there are too many capable persons. But the gate to life is strait for the contrary reason: there are few entering and many crowding in at the other gate. We are like sheep; we like to go in flocks, in crowds. What everybody is doing, everybody will do. Nothing succeeds like success. At the gate of a financial speculation, or of speculative thinking, or of worldly amusement, or of fashionable religion, let many be crowding in and still more will follow. Here and there a few flatter their pride in being singular. But the mass go with the multitude; they love to be in majority; they must be in the swim. To stand against your own circle is hard; it looks like condemning them, and they resent that; or it shows you are not influenced by them; and they love you not for that. The majority assume you are with them, and it is no pleasure to be ever explaining you are not. To stand alone, or with a few, is a strait gate.

Now, the number of religious persons is greater than many suspect. Yet, he who will be religious has to stand with the few. In the warehouse or bank, where is he? Not among the many. In the college, in the dissecting-room, in the club, where is he? Not with the many. The Christian soul often at certain points feels he must part company with others; nice people, he for many reasons wants to walk with them; but, if he keeps the narrow way, part he must. This makes the way narrow, indeed. Nevertheless, enter ye in at the strait gate. If you will, you will have companions enough. Stand not off from Christ's church and work, and you will not find the way lonely.

3. *Then the gate to life is strait, because it needs such persistent energy.*

Now and again success in business or finance may be achieved by a lucky hit, or by one or two great efforts; but even there it is perseverance, sticking-in, that wins. Certainly in all the higher spheres, the prize is only to the man who steadily runs the whole course, not to the man who makes a plunge or puts on a spurt. And, brethren, the Christian life is accomplished, not simply by a flood of tears to-day and a heroic act of faith to-morrow. We do not make the Christian journey by getting aboard some vessel, and then taking it easy; it is a pilgrimage needing on our part constant effort all the way. The evils of youth we conquer; but the strife is not over; middle age brings its temptations, which have to be

resisted. We overcome the difficulties to good which come with straitened circumstances ; but easy circumstances do not bring freedom from temptation to forget God and neglect prayer. In one situation we are hard pressed to evil ; but change the situation, and you only change the form of the pressure. The gate is ever strait, the way ever narrow. It is this constant opposition, this constant need of watchfulness that tries. A great effort now and then has excitement, and we might make it. But this patient continuance in well-doing, this ceaseless watching and fighting, and, after all, not making much way : it is this that wearies, that makes the gate strait and the way narrow. We have need of the exhortation, "Enter ye in at the strait gate."

## II.

### Some helps to enter in at the strait gate.

#### 1. *We meet an objection.*

"Life," say some, "is hard with us. It is strain, stress, striving. And to tell us the good life is a narrow way, is not very comforting. We had looked to religion rather for peace and comfort." Well, of a truth, religion has its green pastures and still waters. It has its balm of Gilead for a wounded spirit, its pillow of peace for a weary head, its bosom of God for a penitent soul. Yes, peace and comfort in

fulness are here in the Christian faith. But Jesus Christ is faithful ; He tells us that, nevertheless, the following of Him is a narrow way. It is not all milk and honey, this holy land of faith ; it is not all green pastures and still waters, this estate of righteousness. Let none think God is so grateful to us for our allegiance that He will make our service a bed of roses ; or that Christ is so eager for our support that He will not insist upon our taking up our cross daily. Personal religion is no easy-chair in which we may sit and sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss. The gate to life is strait, the way is narrow. There is need of penitence and faith, watching and praying, wrestling and fighting. "Enter ye in at the strait gate."

2. *And since this is so, let none think that they must be extra bad, or, at least, not Christians, because they find the way so difficult.*

They have so much trouble with the evil of their heart. Nothing strange has happened to you ; you are in the narrow way : the way the saints of God have ever trod. If we find the way easy, there is reason to suspect whether we are really pressing on in the narrow way.

And let us not judge. We see a Christian youth stumble in his faith, for he has met many obstacles. Or we see a Christian fail in temper, or in speech, or in conduct, and we are apt to say, "Shame ! Such inconsistency ! His Christianity is a hypocrisy !" Remember, consistency is a very narrow way, even to

the best. You see the failure ; have you seen the labour and the strife not to fail ? the shame and penitence at the failure—the despair, almost ? Let us be gentle, let us not judge ; to our weak, erring souls the way of goodness is not easy.

3. *But note as a help how great is the motive—life or destruction ?*

We are not as poor persons, without a penny and without a character, and, therefore, with nothing to lose. We are children of God, with a certain amount of spiritual capital—with mind and soul, and placed in the midst of great opportunities for life ; we have eternity before us. We have much to lose or much to gain. Life ! The mind alive in truth, the heart alive with full affection, the conscience alive in the vision of duty and the enjoyment of peace, the soul alive in joyous communion with God. Life ! The activity of our finer faculties, the consciousness of their expansion, the enjoyment of achievement, of progress, of laying up imperishable treasure, the sense of wealth and power in truth and in God, the enjoyment of service with God for the coming of the Kingdom, the hope of the crown of life, of life regal, imperial, in and with God for ever. That is worth an effort to attain. That is worth the striving needful to walk the narrow way. Destruction ! Destruction of our higher sentiments, of the peace of our conscience, of the life of our spirit ! Destruction of our faith, our love, our hope ; of our character, of our soul. Destruction ! The pains of the final condem-

nation of God, of banishment from His presence into the darkness unutterable, into the penal fires of self-reproach and remorse. To escape destruction, shall we not make an effort ?

“ Enter ye in at the strait gate ; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.”



THE TEST OF THE PROPHET

BY REV. THOS. G. SELBY



## THE TEST OF THE PROPHET

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”—MATTHEW vii. 15-20.

THE false prophet filled a sinister place in the history of Israel, and many a time directed the course of both kings and peoples to mistake and fatal disaster. The type presented every possible variety. The false prophet was sometimes, from the beginning to the end of his career, a consistent and audacious deceiver; sometimes he was an opportunist, who wished to further the policy of his patrons, and cried, “Peace, peace,” when no such word was written in the book of fate; and sometimes he was a faithless man, who had lost the true gift possessed in the days of his uncorrupted youth. At the outset of his career the Great Teacher felt that in both the near and the remote future history would repeat itself, and that the false prophet of every shade and degree would

make himself felt for evil. In this discourse, delivered soon after the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus warns the multitude of their danger, and announces the test by which the pretender may be distinguished from a man commissioned of God.

In the recorded sayings of our Lord, it is strange that we find no denunciation of the priest, and no direction given by which a member of the true succession may be separated from the false. The priest was as much his enemy as the scribe, and took a more responsible part in bringing about his death. He was just as wolfish in temper as the lying prophet, and in the parable of the Good Samaritan a sidelight is cast upon his hard, complacent selfishness. But the priest was to have little part in making the thought and belief of the future, and it was scarcely necessary to warn the multitude against his cozening arts. He lived in the temple, or in a close community of his own, and did not act as leaven for either good or evil in the midst of the masses. The work of his order had settled down into official ruts. The rites he performed were accepted by those who were in distress of soul; but he was not looked up to as a guide and teacher of the nation. The ideas embodied in the temple service were culminating to their last fulfilment, and no earthly revival of this specific office was contemplated by Jesus Christ. If grace were hereafter to depend upon a priesthood, Jesus ought to have taught His hearers how to appraise its credentials. But He did no such thing.

He knew that the prophet was to make the vital beliefs of the future, and looked upon the selection of a faithful guide as all-important. Many men are ready to tell us by what historic touchstone we may distinguish a genuine from a fictitious priesthood. Jesus told us how to identify the true prophet, for every age is made or is woefully marred by the work of its prophets.

Does not this admonition, "Beware of false prophets," seem to infringe upon the rule, "Judge not, that ye be not judged"? The captious temper, forbidden in the earlier counsel, and the shrewd discrimination here required, are totally different things. Many of the problems in our neighbours' conduct are obscure, and it is not for us to pronounce sentence when half the factors are hidden from us. All surmise and evil imagination are condemned by Jesus Christ. But if a man offers himself as God's messenger to our souls, we have the right to form an estimate of his motives and qualifications. The maxims of an extreme Christian charity cannot possibly prevent us from discriminating between the wolf and the sheep, even when the wolf wraps itself in the most snow-white fleece it can find. The ferocious instinct is irrepressible, and under the most cunning disguise it will soon declare itself. We know the wolf by what it threatens, and by what it quickly does. And it is just as easy to detect the false prophet. If he occupies a pulpit and abets slavery, bloodshed, the vices and infamies of the patron whose favour he seeks to keep;

if he champions the cause of the mighty and prosperous against their torn and down-trodden victims ; if he preaches the glory of a State under which large sections of the population live in hunger and rags, whilst thousands of gold and silver are taken from them, and flung to those who already possess more than heart could wish ; such a prophet, if no wolf himself, is at least the wolf's advocate and apologist. He shepherds the wolves, and abets them in their rapine. The true prophet is always a lover of those whom God loves, and his word makes for help, healing, amelioration, progress, stable happiness. If we are sober and watchful, we shall always be able to unmask the prophet who has the fleece of the lamb and the soul of a beast of prey. A flock of sheep, perhaps, might be so drugged that they would lose all power of recognising the invading wolf ; and a drunken and besotted multitude may fail in those perceptive instincts which are a part of the law of moral self-preservation. But under ordinary circumstances we know, even the dullest of us. To pick out men whose characters and counsels make for evil and not for good, is easier than to learn one's letters. The disguise of the false prophet need not befool and destroy us. Men and systems alike are known by their fruits.

But it is just as important for us to identify the true as to unmask the false prophet. In the first stage of our spiritual history, we may often need the guidance of those who have a deeper insight into

realities, and a more far-reaching forecast of the issues of conduct than we can claim for ourselves. Jesus practically reaffirms the Old Testament rule. The teacher of God's will must be tested in moral ways, and if he fails when put to this elementary proof, no miraculous gifts can rehabilitate his title to be heard. A good man will do good, and his spirit and work always refresh and enrich the world. Whilst the false prophet is a pest and a peril to the commonwealth, and an enemy of the real faith, the true prophet is a benediction to his own and to other generations. What a long golden age it would have been for Israel if the test had been applied with courage and the true prophet had been always followed!

OUR LORD'S WORDS ARE FATAL TO THE CLAIM SOMETIMES URGED THAT INSPIRATION IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF OFFICE, AND THAT AUTHORITY TO DIRECT ARISES ONLY IN CONNECTION WITH A PROCESS OF ARBITRARY HUMAN SELECTION. The wolf is not humanised by putting upon it the mark of the man who owns the sheep-farm, or converted into a bell-wether by hanging a piece of tinkling metal upon its neck. The thorn cannot be turned into a grape-vine by transplanting it into an ecclesiastical allotment, nor can the thistle be persuaded to bear figs by an outward consecration which sets it apart to that useful function. Office is determined by the character of the man who fills it, and the kind of work in which he abounds. "But this particular

tree cannot be a thorn, for it is planted in a vineyard, the renown of which has spread to every part of the world. This growth you are pleased to call a thistle flourishes in exact line with one of the most wonderful groups of fig trees ever cultivated." The only question to be asked is, What does it bear? Neither the soil nor the scheme of the planting can settle the species. The tree is known by its fruits, and the most ingenious system of classification and botanical nomenclature cannot set aside the test.

The power of working miracles, if it stands alone, is not enough to commend a religious teacher to our faith, as the Lord goes on to show in this discourse. Some who claim affiliation with the Divine King on this solitary ground will be rejected in the last judgment; and if the threat of rejection is over them, they cannot well lead others into a salvation of which they come short. In his sermon on "The disciples forbidding one who was casting out devils in the name of Jesus," John Henry Newman argues that the incident cannot be used to justify the position of those who are not of the Anglican fold, because Dissenters have not the power of casting out devils. The cases, he argues, are not parallel. Such sophistical pleading shows how a great and learned man may succeed in closing his eyes to the foundation-teachings of Jesus Christ. The Master puts the power of working miracles in a subordinate place, and rested all authority to teach upon reverence and genuine



benignity of character. The test He gave was not academic. On the one hand, He was no apologist for a slipshod illiteracy, nor was He prepared, on the other hand, to surrender Himself and His generation to the dictates of licensed pedants and pedagogues. He does not undervalue industrious scholarship and conscientious research when He affirms that the qualification of the religious teacher is moral, and that the multitude can prove its rightful leaders, if it will take the trouble to do so. He submitted Himself to the verdict of the people, rather than to that of the synagogues and the Sanhedrim. Personal goodness and fidelity are the tests of the God-sent teacher and prophet, and where they are lacking, the Master Himself releases us from all obligation to heed and to obey.

THE GIFT WHICH MAKES A MAN INTO A PROPHET IS NOT A GIFT OF BIRTH, OR OF UNCOMMON TEMPERAMENT. As we study the life-history of the early teachers of Israel, it sometimes seems as though the man through whom God speaks were a mere mouthpiece. Supernatural forces act upon the passive rather than the active half of the personality, and the speaker is swept forward by an impulse from the unseen which is irresistible. Perhaps it was sometimes so in the primitive ages, but the initial exception must not be put for the final rule. In Balaam, for instance, the power of visualising the future seems more akin

to an ecstasy of genius than to a high attribute of spiritual character. But, coincident with the inspiration which visited him, there was a power wrestling for dominion in the sphere of his character ; and when he proved himself recalcitrant, the guiding gift failed, and he perished in his own devices. A broad distinction between the inspiration of genius and the specific inspiration of religious revelation, which modern literature tends to confuse, is that the former is independent of high qualities of character, and the latter dependent upon them. It is through the moral side of a man's personality that the Spirit of God gains access to the faculties and makes him into a prophet. The Master's rule for testing the prophet, of course, does not imply that the prophet has been a perfect man at every stage of his career. Blight may settle for a time upon a tree inherently good. Vine and fig are not protected by the fineness of their strains from the foes which war against other plants and trees. Indeed, the nobler the strain, the greater, perhaps, the susceptibility to disease. But, frosts and east winds, blights and drawbacks notwithstanding, the vine always tends to produce grapes and the fig-tree to bear figs ; and a true prophet always makes for what is good, and a true religion always fructifies into present and eternal blessing. Inspiration is prepared for by moral character, and so closely identified with it that a prophet can have no higher credentials than his good works.

We cannot err in listening to a man whose life is obviously right in the sight of God and man, and who brings to us the secret of refreshment and spiritual health. "The tree is known by its fruits." The test for the prophet and those to whom he speaks is one. "He that followeth me . . . shall have the light of life." "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know the doctrine." A man becomes a prophet himself when his life is conformed to the pattern of Jesus, and he shows by his tempers and acts that he is united to the vine. The germ and sap-cells of vine and fig-tree are in them from the beginning, and they answer the requirements of the husbandman as they grow to the hidden type that is in them. And the prophet who does God's work is the product which arises from a moral life that has been divinely infixed within him, and his developments are the unfoldings of a sacred inner principle. The right to teach, and the inspiration which conveys it, are vitally related to character. No bad man can be the herald of a holy God.

THE KIND OF EVIDENCE WHICH ATTESTS OR DISCREDITS THE PROPHET IS INTELLIGIBLE TO THE CROWD. The dullest man can weigh it for himself, and draw his own conclusions. It was a part of Christ's programme that it should be so. He had to relax the hold of the vain-glorious scribe upon popular favour before he could make

for Himself and His disciples a place in that common heart of society within which the new faith was to be cradled. It would have frustrated His own counsels, to make the test technical or academic. An intricate scheme of argument would not have been suited to popular use and application. No aptitude or facility for historical research was required, although Jesus did appeal to the word of prophecy when dealing with those who were versed in the Scriptures. The hearing of the Scriptures read in the synagogues, with their impressive lessons of reverence and righteousness, would make the man in the crowd a competent judge of the pretensions of the prophet. A few years ago the question of the validity of Anglican orders was submitted to the Pope, through the influence of a High Church nobleman. A conclave of learned theologians and ecclesiastical lawyers was called together, and after months of research and deliberation, it was decided that those orders were uncanonical upon three or four grounds. It was not absolutely certain that Archbishop Parker had been episcopally ordained; a certain piece of silver plate was not usually given to the candidate for orders as an emblem of the power conveyed by the bishop; the appointing words were incomplete; and there was no specific intention of conveying the power to work a miraculous change upon the sacramental elements. Such methods of verification were entirely out of Christ's horizon.

His test was for the multitude, and did not need for its application an expert in theology and ecclesiastical law. A child can know by the grape and the fig the kind of stock from which such products come, and can distinguish fruit from tasteless or noxious berries. And every man might know who was good, and who was not, and distinguish a prophet from a blind guide and an impostor. The house-dog even has an insight into character. The prophet must henceforth be designated, not by the seal of kings, the imprimatur of the schools, the license of a college of learned cardinals, but by the instinct of the crowd. It was thus that he looked for the recognition of his own person and work, and for the world's welcome of his messengers. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

THE SETTING UP OF THIS TEST IMPLIES THAT JESUS EXPECTED THE TRUE PROPHET TO MAKE HIMSELF ONE WITH THE PEOPLE. If the life, work, and personality of the prophet is to be hidden from his contemporaries, if he is to be hedged in by rigid etiquettes, if he is as difficult to get at as a crowned king, the test is inapplicable. The judgment we exercise upon the claims of a prophet must rest upon something sounder than popular rumour and the gossip of colleagues and trainbearers, for, till we have inward illumination ourselves, the judgment may be vital to our spiritual destiny. We cannot tell whether a tree is good or otherwise, a vine or a glorified bramble, a fig-tree or a gigantic and

gorgeous thistle, if it is planted in an inaccessible garden, and the fruit is gathered and consumed in another world than ours. The good tree must be where we can watch it and sample its products. The Pope who lives in the Vatican is probably devout, blameless, and full of good works, one of the best men who has ever filled St Peter's chair. The Archbishops probably possess all those qualifications of office laid down by St Paul in the pastoral epistles. But they live in palaces, far above my sphere, to which I have no admission; and I cannot apply Christ's test to these chief prophets unless in a roundabout fashion. I may be indebted to their public utterances, but no unknown man can rule the most sacred part of my faith. If they were to go round the country on horseback, like the white-haired evangelist of the eighteenth century, and live half the year with the poor and the lowly, it might be possible to prove the tree by its fruits, and believe the spirit of prophecy was in the Church because of the sanctity of its chief rulers. How can I know what fruit is borne by the tree which grows on the slopes of the Apennines or in an orchard in South California. If I am to prove the tree by its fruits, the tree must not be a thousand miles away from my home, or in another country from that in which I live. It was to afford every facility for the use of His own test that Jesus gave the common people an opportunity of knowing Him, and sent those who had learned something of His benignity into the towns

and villages of the land. He made Himself accessible to the people at the public festivals, and any one might speak to Him without the formality of an introduction. He was "a prophet like unto His brethren," and He would have been unproved had He ordered His life upon any other plan. And if Christ's test is to be applied still, we must be able to get at the prophet.

THESE WORDS SEEM TO BRING INTO VIEW OUR LORD'S FORECASTS OF THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE FAITH HE FOUNDED. He looked for His religion to grow and strengthen through the discriminations of hosts of hearers—discriminations continuously applied to a succession of living contemporary teachers, with a message from the Most High. Such a test as He here prescribes cannot be brought to bear upon a Church centralised in a visible earthly head. When the rigid rule is laid down that the clergy make the Church, and the bishops make the clergy, and the primate makes the bishops, there is no scope for judging the tree by its fruits, and weighing the worth of a prophet's message by his private and public acts. It is impossible for any large number of the adherents of a Church which has overspread a province and ramified through a continent, to know the character of its chief minister, who is said to be the channel of grace to a multitudinous membership, even if all the actions of that chief minister were chronicled in a veracious press, and the white light of an untiring criticism were brought to bear upon

every secret of his life. Perhaps the head of such a Church does not speak the tongues of one-tenth of the people over whom he exercises ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and it is only the handful of people who are in direct personal contact with him who can judge him by the fruits which appear in his spirit and life. It is obvious that as the faith spreads from generation to generation, and organised Christianity grows and half fills the world, we can only judge the right of a Church to teach and direct by that particular section of its membership which comes within the range of our observation. If we lack the fulness of inward illumination, and still need to lean upon the prophet, we are in harmony with Christ's rule when we take God's message from the lips of the holiest man or the saintliest woman we know. The common gift of prophecy has been poured upon God's servants and handmaidens; and if we ourselves have not received it, we cannot greatly err in making those who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit our guides and our counsellors. The test was a test for the use of the multitude, and we must begin to apply it just where our lot is cast. If the Church is to have an earthly and a visible head, we can only test the head by the member who is nearest to us.

It may be asked, "*How can this rule be of universal relevancy, if the standards of morality set up by the various races of mankind diverge to the extent which is often represented?*" Is not the conclusion inevitable that every race must have its own separate prophet,



and that a common religion for all men is impossible?" Perhaps every race may have its own prophet. But do standards of morality vary in different zones so much as is assumed? The underlying principles of conduct are the same amongst all races, although there have been capricious applications of those principles, and a varying emphasis put upon different duties. We are much nearer to a common system of morality throughout the world than to a common system of religion. Did not Jesus, who was trained as a Jew, and was zealous for the distinctive rites of His race, commend Himself to Samaritans, Roman centurions, distressed Syro-Phenicians, Greek truth-seekers, as impressively as to his own countrymen? Virtue has no parochial accent, is independent of race, culture, and climate, its presence enlisting admiration and its lack provoking resentment north, south, east, and west. Cannibals felt the moral magnetism of John Hunt of Fiji and James Chalmers of New Guinea. Hindoos were captivated by the heroism and splendid unselfishness of John Nicholson, and were tempted to worship him. The piety of General Gordon, the soldier-saint, made the same profound impression upon the Confucianist and the Mahommedan. The prophet who is accredited by moral and spiritual qualities corresponding to his vocation will in due time gain a hearing and create the faith which comes by hearing on every continent of

the earth and in every island of the sea. Tastes are at least so far alike that thorn and thistle are nowhere expressly introduced into the garden and cultivated as though they would produce dainties. Nor is there a race with palate so perverted and disorganised as to despise the grape and fig, and refuse to cultivate them where they can be made to grow. The true religious teacher, wherever he may be, will be recognised as a man of God, if he have the unmistakable note of high personal character. A religion spreads amongst men in proportion to the purity and beneficence of its witnesses, and the best evidence of Christianity is the part it has filled in past history, and still fills, however imperfectly, in our own time, as the fostering genius of truth, righteousness, reverence, compassion.

*Does not the test elevate the mere moralist into a prophet?* It does not imply that every moralist is a prophet, but it affirms that every prophet of God must be a moralist of the highest order. The prophets were transfigured moralists, and it was in the pathway of obedience that they found their peculiar inspiration. The man who passes for a moralist may belong to either of two classes—the mimetic or the inspirational. The morality of those men whom we are accustomed to describe as “legalists,” is artificial, a mere shroud wound about the outward form, which gives no trace of the inner man it conceals. They try to grow themselves into certain shapes required by the social and religious codes under

which they have been brought up. Their passions are discreetly curbed, and the precepts kept which are necessary to the integrity of the home, for is not the home the basis of both happiness and prosperity? The traditions of commercial honesty must be respected, because the least slip would mean dislocation and displacement from one's proper niche in life. They are temperate, because it is good for the health, and the example will safeguard the children in their after-careers. They go to church, and identify themselves vaguely with the religious ideals of the community, because it is patriotic, good form, and an example for the young. They keep the letter of the commandments, but there they draw the line, and in so doing give the gauge of their sincerity. They are always trying to conform to something. They train themselves to keep rules, rather than to foster and express the impulses which throb in the more sacred recesses of the nature. Such a man, however correct in behaviour, is no prophet. He is a thistle on to which figs have been tied, a thorn hung with grape-clusters. He does just that to which he is outwardly constrained—no less, no more, and this even with a marked dearth of enthusiasm. If he appears before us parading his fruits, we may be quite sure they are not the products of his own real nature. But another man does right because a Divine breath expands his faculties, and he is inwardly moved to it. He acts from the centre. A living God is operative in all His acts of righteousness.

He does not stop at what the letter requires. This is the test. His virtue is unconstrained. In a genuine, palpitating moralist, there is always the making of a prophet. The good man has the secret of goodness, and we may accept him as a prophet, for he can teach it to us, and that is God's supreme reason for sending the prophet. We listen to the men who wrote the Bible, because they were good trees bringing forth good fruit, and we listen to the one Master-prophet for the same reason. He is the true vine, yielding the world wonderful fruit.

A sense of the precariousness and insufficiency of our religious knowledge makes many of us still dependent upon the man who claims to have a message, and we therefore need "to try the spirits, whether they be of God." To what kind of prophet do we submit our souls? The present generation divides its allegiance between the priest, the biologist, the politician, the social philanthropist, and the pressman, who is often a compound of the rest, with a dash of the sporting prophet thrown in to complete the blend. Some of those with whom religion is an urgent instinct resort to the priest. If he bears a proper hall-stamp, it saves much trouble in making a choice. Trust the label, and do not trouble about the fruits. The past and its stately precedents have a claim upon us. Perhaps so. If the priest is a man of God with a burning message, a message accredited by his personal life, by all means listen to him; but not because of his garb and adventitious status.

Mere office, according to the Sermon on the Mount, does not guarantee possession of the spirit of prophecy. If he is taught of God, and shows it in every part of his demeanour, he is fitted to teach us the secret of goodness, and we sin in refusing to listen to him. But remember, at the same time, that God's way is to pour grace into the prophet's lips, and not into his hands, and we live by the truth rather than by sacramental magic. As a matter of fact, where undue stress is placed upon the sacerdotal office, the gift of prophecy declines, and it is necessary to institute a special and separate order of preachers. The man of science, as a true interpreter of Nature, commands our admiration, but he has no more right as a physicist to dictate our religion than has a King's Counsel to write a prescription. A young man, full of himself and his feeble smattering of science, once said to me, "Professor Huxley is much more likely to be a competent judge of the truth of Christianity than the parsons." Is it not absurd to assume that the man who has spent the greater part of his life in studying the turmoil and the red conflict of the brute creation comes nearer to an appreciation of the mind of God than the man who has spent much of his life in looking for the Divine glory in the face of Jesus Christ and his best followers? It is the work of the seers of the field and the laboratory to investigate the forms and the substances of which the senses are cognisant, and to set forth their laws; but unless the most brilliant of these men is in fellow-

ship with God, he has no mandate to pronounce upon the facts of the spiritual world. The statesman may teach a nation the secret of political salvation, but he still leaves the citizens of the nation face to face with their solemn relations to the unseen God. We sympathise with our social reformers, and it ought to be a part of our religion to help on the realisation of their hopes; but the living wage, the garden city, and the abolition of the slum, are matters which do not cover the whole of life, and the noble men who herald and create improved social conditions are not necessarily the best of all religious guides. Perhaps these are some of the fruits which may attest the possession of a genuine prophetic spirit. In making ready the sound body, within which a sound mind can act, the philanthropist is doing the initial work of God's Kingdom, but he is not therefore "a steward of its mysteries." Some of us listen to the voice of the Press as though no such voice had been heard in the past history of the world. Would that we opened our Bibles with as much deference to their counsels as the morning newspaper! It is no small gain to have many pages in the biography of human nature placed before our eyes day by day. But we shall do well to master the facts and scrutinise the comments upon them offered to us. The pressman may be a hireling and not a prophet. We hope the best about him, but at any rate he is anonymous, and we cannot judge the tree by its fruits. Believe the man whose goodness

lives before your eyes continually, and you cannot go far astray. You will find the truest prophet in the saintliest character who has come within the range of your experience ; and in this sense there are few places without their prophets. Listen to Jesus Christ, the perfect pattern of goodness, the prophet given to us by the Eternal God in these last times. Hear ye Him, for He is the well-beloved in Heaven and upon earth. If you accept Him as a prophet He will in due time minister to you His priestly and His regal benedictions.





SELF-DECEPTION

BY REV. ALBERT GOODRICH, D.D.



## SELF-DECEPTION

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven,” etc.—MATTHEW vii. 21, 22, 23.

IN the Kingdom, and not in the Kingdom! There is a wide difference, our Lord here implies, between these two. Wheat and tares, sheep and goats, grapes and thistles, alive and dead—these are quite distinct, altogether different. But the difference between the believer and the unbeliever is deeper, vaster.

The insistence upon this difference, it is true, is apt to create a spiritual aristocracy, and to minister to the most satanic sin—spiritual pride. Still, the difference between being in and not in the Kingdom of Heaven is immense. The believer belongs to one universe; the unbeliever to another.

And yet, though the difference is so vast, in this present time it is not often very visible. In their early growth, the tare and the wheat are much alike; only the skilled can detect the difference. The two houses—one on the sand, the other on

the rock—look to the passer-by equally secure, quite the same; the supreme difference between them is in their foundations, which are out of sight. The difference between believer and unbeliever is often not in the superstructure of their character; it lies in the motive and purpose, in the foundation of the character. The Christian life is hid with Christ in God. And the non-Christian life is hid with self in the world.

Our passage speaks of self-deception. Notice (1) its possibility; (2) its discovery; (3) its avoidance.

## I.

### Its possibility.

Many think they are poets. They do wonderful works in rhyme; they prophesy, and do many mighty works in the name of poetry. The great warrior, Frederick the Great, did not think much about his being a great warrior; but he thought he did many mighty works in verse. He was in great wroth when Voltaire told him that the goddess, Poetry, said of him, "I never knew him."

There have been men who thought they were great military officers, generals of the first order. In their thoughts, and even in their speech, they have prophesied much, and done many works in the name of Mars. But in the day of battle, their

day of judgment, Mars said to them, "I never knew you; depart from me."

Not only as to their abilities, but also as to their character, are men woefully self-deceived. Said Dr Johnson, notorious for his brusqueness, "I consider myself a very polite man. I am well bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity. No man is so cautious not to interrupt another; no man thinks it so necessary to appear attentive when others are speaking." "Quite mistaken about yourself, dear Dr Johnson," society has pronounced; "we love you, but Politeness says, 'I never knew you.'" And many proud men think they are very humble, and vain women that they are very lowly, and mean persons that they are very liberal. I am told that the Sultan of Turkey thinks himself to be a very just and merciful ruler!

Since then, in general, we are so apt to deceive ourselves, it is not impossible that in the matter of whether or not we know and are known of the Lord, we may deceive ourselves. "Not every one that says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Many say "Lord, Lord." They admire the character of Jesus Christ; they say fine things about it; they quote some of His sayings with admiration, and like to compare Jesus, to His advantage, with other great teachers. They attend a Christian Church, and support to a degree its worship and work. They say "Lord, Lord," but

they have no communion with God. Are they doing the will of the Father?

Some go further. They in Christ's name prophecy and cast out devils. They can speak very well against injustices and vices. They have not a little indignation against sins they are not inclined to. They can declaim against drunkenness, against gambling, against social frauds and political grievances. They can even preach a very fair sermon. They prophecy in the Lord's name, and cast out, or attempt to cast out, some of the devils that possess and torment society. But their private life is not clean. Do they do the will of the Father? Are they known of the Lord Christ?

And some in the name of the Lord do wonderful works. They have wonderful experiences of soul, wonderful convictions of sin, wonderful manifestations of the Divine love. They do some wonderful swearings at themselves for their failures, and they make some wonderful resolutions, and they attempt some wonderful works. They, therefore, think all is well; that the Lord will be even proud to open the Kingdom of Heaven to them. But they do not the will of the Father. They fail in the commonplace duties of veracity, fidelity, equity, charity. Will not the Lord say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me"?

## II.

**Self-deception : its discovery.**

“How do you detect the real gem from the false, the genuine from the paste?” asked one of a dealer in gems. His reply in the main was: “In these days science and art have so advanced that artificial gems can be made to glow with the colour and sparkle with the brilliance of the real, so that the most skilful eye is sometimes deceived. We try acids, and the false will bear the sharp tooth which heretofore has been sure to detect the counterfeit. We subject the stone to a fiery ordeal, and it comes out unharmed. We try polarised light, and even it does not reveal the falsity of the false. Time alone is the detective. With the passing years the glory of the base pretender fades, and the lustrous gem stands revealed as but a bit of glass or a brittle stone.” Even so, the supreme test of Christian character is time. Many young men and women start on the Christian way. For a time they shine and sparkle even more than God’s tested jewels. They may even chide the saint of years’ standing for lack of faith and slackness of work. But time moves on. They marry. The cares of a family gather upon them. Temptations thicken. Demands upon them multiply. The ideality of youth passes; the splendour which attended the youth fades into the light of common

day. In many ways he is disillusioned. He falls away from Christian work. Attendance at Divine worship becomes fitful. Private prayer is neglected. A secular tone becomes dominant in his life. He has lost interest in things divine; aye, even real faith. Though he called Christ "Lord, Lord," and wrought, as he thought, many wonderful works in His name, time with its wear and tear has revealed to him that he was mistaken. He had not taken grip of the truth, nor had the truth taken grip of him. He was deceived. The Lord is saying to him, "I never knew you." But, praise to His name, the Lord does not now say, "Depart from Me." On the contrary, He says, "Repent; and knowing now your utter weakness, cast yourself absolutely upon Me for forgiveness and life, and I will receive you."

But in our passage the Lord contemplates that self-deception which lasts all through life, and not till "that day"—the day of judgment—will the miserable self-deceiver discover the dreadful error. Many in that day will say, in surprise, deprecating his condemnation, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many mighty works"? We have known of cases of men going down to the grave with high reputations as Christian men, their biography has been begun in the full anticipation of its proving to be most edifying; but, alas! inquiry near and far revealed, to the astonishment of friends, that the man had been living in secret, not a Christian



life. There is a hypocrisy which knows it is hypocrisy; but there is a hypocrisy so complete that the hypocrite himself is deceived. But that day is coming. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We then shall be made manifest. "There will I profess unto them, I never knew you. You deceived others; you deceived yourself; but you did not deceive me. You thought I knew you; but I never knew or approved or accepted you. You have been living in a vain show. You have been the victim of your own vanity and hypocrisy. I *never* knew you; depart from me." How will that word overwhelm these poor souls in hopeless dismay and despair? Let the possibility of such a dread hour falling to us move us to self-examination, and to a very lowly waiting upon our Lord.

### III.

#### **Self-deception : its avoidance.**

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom, but he that doeth the will of My Father." The way to avoid self-deception is to do the will of the Father. What is required is not faultless observance of a set of rules imposed upon us by some self-important schoolmaster or mere disciplinarian or vain precisionist. Neither is it the obedience to commands, arbitrary, vexatious,

of some official proud of office, or some ruler of imperious will. No, we have to do the will of the Father; a will which we as His children know is wise and good, in no sense grievous; a will which, obeyed, makes for our highest good.

The will of the Father! We all know that to make long prayers, and devour widows' houses, is not the will of the Father. Neither is it the will of the Father to devour widows' houses though we make no long prayers. We all know it is not the will of the Father that we in business should give short measure, or make false or partially false statements, or misrepresent the value of goods, or make people pay twice over for the same goods, or obtain goods with no hope of paying for them. We all know it is not the will of the Father that workpeople should be overworked or underpaid, or made to work in insanitary conditions; or that workpeople should waste their employers' materials, or injure their plant, or waste their time, or scamp their work. We all know it is the will of the Father that husbands should love their wives, and that children should honour their parents; that wives should cherish their husbands; and that parents should so rule as not to make their children bitter. We all know that it is not the will of the Father that we should be hard, unkindly, unmerciful, unsympathetic towards the weak, the unfortunate, the sinful. Are we doing the will of the Father? Are we, on these lower levels of common daily life, acting out the common

virtues of honesty, veracity, equity, fidelity? Our outer garments or habits of life may be fine and showy enough, but what about the plain under-clothing of common and private life? Is that linen clean?

Is the present state of society, its drunkenness, its gambling, its licentiousness, its legalised opportunities and temptations to excessive drinking and vice of all sorts, its corruptions in municipal and in political life, its oppressions and frauds by companies, its sordid-looking towns and cities, its insanitary dwellings,—are these things according to the will of the Father? If not, what are we doing to get His will herein done? Are we doing with respect to them His will? If we know the Lord, and if the Lord knows us, we shall do, not simply wish to do, not simply hope some one will do, not simply make resolutions to do, but we ourselves shall actually do the will of the Father. Defects we shall have, but the dominant note of our life will be doing the will of the Father. “Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven.”



THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH  
BUILDERS

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.



## THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH BUILDERS

“Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock,” etc.—MATTHEW vii. 24-27.

BOTH St Matthew and St Luke agree in placing this parable or similitude at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and it is evidently intended by our Lord to be the practical application of the truths He had just been proclaiming.

Jesus knew that His message would meet with a very different reception amongst different classes of His hearers. There would be those amongst them, doubtless, to whom it would come home as the very message for which they had been waiting, and who would seek earnestly to appropriate the blessings which it offered for themselves. Their hearts, that had turned away wearily from the long disquisitions of the Rabbis on some minute point of law or ritual, would respond gladly to this new Teacher, who proclaimed a Gospel for the poor, and who laid upon men's shoulders no impossible yoke, as He called them to the simple exercise of faith and love.

There would be another class, however, to whom the

very simplicity and graciousness of Christ's message would prove its chief stumbling-block. It was so unlike what they had been accustomed to. It brought the kingdom for which they had been looking so much within the reach of all, instead of making it a select society, in which they, as leading Jews, would have the chief place. Besides, who was this man, that He should thus seek to instruct them, the religious heads and rulers of the nation? For their part, they would have none of Him.

But different from both these classes of hearers—the class of warm friends and the class of pronounced foes—Jesus knew that there was a large middle class, probably the most numerous class of all. On them, too, His words had produced a marked effect. They could not but admire the wisdom and the power with which He spoke. They admitted—their own hearts told them—that what He said was true, and that only in so far as men showed a loving, forgiving, merciful spirit, could they prove themselves true members of this new kingdom that had just been set up. But when it came to the actual exercise of these qualities in their own persons, then their difficulties began. Hearers—that they were willing to be—warm, attached, even enthusiastic hearers, for that matter; but doers—was there not the gravest danger that here they might fail, and that when it came to the true test of Christian profession, the test of *obedience*, they would be found wanting?

And so it is that, before He closes His sermon,



Jesus, with the thought of this last class of hearers specially before Him, utters some of the clearest, most decided words we find in all His teaching, upon the absolute necessity of doing following hearing, of conduct corresponding to creed.

He begins by appealing to an illustration from the natural world. Take a tree—and it is clear from what follows that it is a fruit tree of which He is thinking—the true test of such a tree is its fruit. It may be covered with foliage: it may blossom luxuriantly: but unless in its season the blossom is replaced by fruit, the tree fails in the very purpose for which it exists. And so with men. How many are there who are always ready to call, “Lord, Lord!” And so far well. It is the homage to which He is entitled, men’s tribute to the truth of His words. But do they not see for themselves how vain all such professions of loyalty are, unless accompanied by practical fruits in the heart and life? “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

It might be thought that such a warning would be sufficient. The truth it embodied was so obvious, and appealed so forcibly to what men could not but recognise to be just and fair. But Jesus knew the extreme deceitfulness of the human heart, and how easy, how fatally easy, men would find it to blind themselves on this very matter. And so He adds yet another word of warning. And this time He takes His illustration, not from the world of Nature, but from the world of human conduct and affairs.

Jesus bids His hearers picture to themselves a valley, through which there runs a little mountain stream. It is the height of summer, and the stream, as is usual in the East, is almost dried up. On the banks overhanging it, two men determine to build houses for themselves. The one carefully selects his site, and digs down through the gravelly bank until he finds a rock foundation on which his house may rest. The other takes no such precautions. Too ignorant or too careless to think of possible danger in the future, he runs his house hurriedly up, and for a time sees no reason to regret his haste. To all outward appearance his house looks as well as his neighbour's. And he may be congratulating himself, if he ever thinks about the matter at all, that he has done well to get so good a house at so little cost and trouble. But suddenly his pleasant dream is broken in upon. The hot, dry summer is past; the winter storms have begun. With startling rapidity, the little stream becomes a raging torrent, and sweeping down fills its bed from bank to bank, testing to the uttermost everything that it meets in its course. Hardly for a moment is the fate of the foolish builder's house in doubt. Fair outwardly, it has no inward stability to stand such a trial. It falls: and great is the fall of it. But against the utmost attacks of wind and flood, the wise man's house stands secure. It falls not: for it is founded upon a rock.

Such is the parable, and it hardly needs our Lord's

own application to make its meaning clear. He who hears and does his Lord's words, who pays earnest heed to every wise and prudent counsel, and then, with painstaking and care, seeks to carry it out—to whom can he be more fittingly likened than to the wise builder? Whereas he who hears and does not, is not he the foolish builder, loud in profession, but unstable in conduct, and whose insufficiency will be only too sadly shown in the hour of trial?

We have seen that Christ's warning was needed when His parable was first spoken. Can we say that it is less needed now? Or are not His words meeting with the same threefold reception that they met with in His own days?

Still there are those—and we trust an ever-increasing number—who find in His law the supreme law of their lives, and who are daily proving themselves, not in name only, but in deed, His disciples. Still there are those who are hardening themselves against Him, who give His word, if we may so put it, no chance, but openly, wilfully, reject Him and His teaching. And still—and may we not again say that this is the great danger which we all run?—there are those who hear, hear willingly, hear gladly, but who are content with hearing, and make no earnest effort to carry out what yet in their inmost hearts they know and believe to be right. It is to them, above all, that this parable is addressed, and for whom its solemn lessons are intended. What these lessons are has appeared from what has

already been said ; but it may help us in taking them home to ourselves, if we gather them together once more in four simple and practical thoughts.

## I.

**We may learn from the contrast between the wise and foolish builders *how vain mere outward profession is.***

Outwardly, and to begin with, there was little or nothing to choose between the two houses. The one seemed as good as the other, and as well fitted to discharge all the functions of a house. But this was in appearance only, and when the time of testing came, the essential difference between them quickly appeared.

Nor is it different in the world of men, of human life. How many are there who, because they perform certain outward religious duties, are regular in their attendance at church, and make a point of never being absent from the communion-table, imagine that they are doing all that is required of them. And for a time it may be they are able to deceive others, and to deceive even their own hearts. But it is for a time only. And in these hours of sifting and of trial, which at some time or another come to all, their true character appears, and it is seen how shallow are the foundations upon which

they have built, how little real depth of principle they have on which to trust.

## II.

**This is so, in the second place, because they have not made the needful preparations, or exercised the prudence and caution which are required of all who would build aright.**

The difference between the wise and the foolish builders lay not so much in the different character of their foundations, as in the fact that the former had a foundation, while the latter had not. The wise builder employed the time and calm which the summer season gave him in making ready for whatever storms might afterwards arise; but the foolish builder was content with to-day's ease and pleasure, without any thought of the morrow.

And again the contrast forms a striking test or dividing-line between the different characters of men. It is not, indeed, a contrast which, any more than the difference between the two houses of our text, lies upon the surface, but which, to the close observer, is continually showing itself in little unexpected ways, in careless, unguarded words or deeds, which seem at first sight to mean nothing, but which are a true index of the heart and mind within.

We have a striking illustration of this in the test that in the Old Testament story Gideon was directed

to employ in order to reduce the numbers of the army he was leading against the Midianites—the three hundred who drank of the passing stream putting their hands to their mouths were to be preferred to those who threw themselves down on their knees to drink (Judges vii. 4-7). And the reason is clear. The latter were obviously so occupied in the satisfaction of their thirst that for the moment they thought only of it, and were oblivious to the risks they ran. But the three hundred, who sipped the water cautiously in their hands, keeping a strict watch all the time, were the trained and disciplined soldiers, not to be caught unawares, and ready for any attack.

Nor are less watchfulness and carefulness required of us, whether we think of life as a battle in which we have to maintain a continual struggle against an ever-present foe, or as a building which has to be made stable at every point against the floods of selfishness or sin, by which it is threatened. We must not leave even one weak point, or the flood will find its way in, and once in, gradually wreck the whole.

### III.

**We learn, thirdly, how we are helped in this preparation and care by remembering the nature of the foundation upon which we are to rest.**

If, as we have seen, it is necessary to have a foundation, it is no less needful to see that our foundation

is a good one, and one on which we can absolutely depend. And surely there are none who can deny that this is the case with those who trust to that rock foundation of which our text speaks. We may define it in many ways. It may mean for us, in the most general sense, the possession of religious principle—the recognition of One to whom, amidst all the changes and the chances and the storms of life, we may look for help. It was the need of this that Robert Burns felt when he wrote to a friend that—

“When on life we’re tempest-tossed,  
And conscience but a canker,  
A correspondence fixed wi’ Heaven  
Is sure a noble anchor.”

Burns was right. “A correspondence fixed wi’ Heaven” is truly a priceless possession. But do we not also know that this can only be truly enjoyed through the “one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. ii. 5)? “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. iii. 11). He is the eternal Rock of Ages, and the man who puts his trust in Him will not be put to shame.

Only, we must see to it that this trust is a living, a real trust, a trust which finds expression for itself not only in words, but in deeds. It is not the mere naming of the Christ-name that will save a man, but the possession of the Christ-character. It is character alone that counts in the long run. And only he who has put his belief to the test of practice,

and has sought *to be* that which he professes to be, can hope to stand in that Great Day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed.

## IV.

For, lastly, our parable shows us *the result of the two kinds of building, of which we have been speaking. On the one hand, happiness and security; on the other hand, ruin.*

What else, indeed, can the foolish builder look for? He has no definite, enduring purpose in this life, no thought for the future. And the consequence is, that when the testing-time comes he is found wanting. He falls, and the life, which might have accomplished so much, presents that saddest of all spectacles, a shapeless ruin. Whereas, over the man who comes, and hears, and does, no trial, not even the last great trial which death brings, can have any real power. He enjoys even in this world an inward and abiding peace, and in the world to come shall "receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James i. 12).

"Be what thou seemest ; live thy creed,  
Hold up to earth the torch Divine ;  
Be what thou prayest to be made ;  
Let the great Master's steps be thine.

"Fill up each hour with what will last ;  
Buy up the moments as they go ;  
The life above, when this is past,  
Is the ripe fruit of life below."



“Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and ever. Amen.”



# THE TWO BUILDERS

BY THE VERY REV. PRINCIPAL STEWART, D.D.  
St Mary's College, St Andrews



## THE TWO BUILDERS

“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.”—MATTHEW vii. 24-27.

IF there was one message more than another which our Lord brought to the men of his generation, it was the demand for *Reality*—reality in character and life, conformity with the laws of the moral universe, with the purpose and will of God. If there was one feature more than another in what He saw around Him, which roused His indignation and called forth His most vehement reproaches, it was anything of the nature of sham, pretence, self-deception. He had far more tolerance for the evil thing that laid no claim to be other than it was, than for counterfeit goodness, the metal which, though bearing the King's image and superscription, did not ring true. In his heart there was far more sympathy with, far more hope for, the publican and the sinner, than for the Pharisee, who seemed to be what he was not. Men in those days, as men do still, looked around upon the vicious and degraded, the outcast, the social lepers, as the proper sphere for the activity of the

religious teacher and reformer, and were very much astonished to be told that the eminently respectable, temple-frequenting, prayer-uttering, almsgiving, exemplary member of society might stand equally in need of salvation, might be equally far from the Kingdom of God. For a man might be all this and yet not be real, never have had a glimpse of the realities on which a true life must be founded and built up.

It has been said that the supreme lesson of modern science is the necessity of conforming our ideas to facts, that it has given to mankind a new sense of truth. Certainly science has taught us that the laws of the physical world must be reckoned with; that whether we like them or not, they rule; we may live in a world of ideas, but, however plausible and however pleasant such ideas may be, they cannot protect us from the realities which we may yet choose to ignore. Of these realities we must take account, or accept the consequences; law violated will avenge itself, the theories we may have put in its place will be dispelled like a dream when one awaketh. That the laws of the moral world are similarly inviolable, has never in ancient or modern days been more clearly expressed than in that great discourse of which the words of our text form the solemn and sublime conclusion. That righteousness is real, that righteousness has its inexorable laws, even though men may deceive themselves as to what these are, may think to evade them, or trifle with them, or substitute something else for them—is the thought

which inspires every sentence of the Sermon on the Mount. The Saviour seeks to bring the soul in its reality face to face with the reality of God, and strip away every veil of fancy, or presumption, or outward seeming—to scatter false hopes by the inevitable fact. Over against false righteousness, he sets the true. The broad and easy way leads to destruction; the narrow gate is not entered, the straightened way is not pursued, without difficulty—yet these alone lead to life. This is the law of the moral universe, and must be recognised. He who teaches otherwise is a false prophet, whose falsehood the issue will expose. It is of no avail for a man to think he is in the right way, he must make sure that he is. Even sincerity cannot make wrong right, or turn falsehood into truth. A man may be self-deceived, and never doubt that the easy way is as safe as the difficult, the broad as the narrow, until the event shows his mistake. Thus, from point to point, the lesson is impressively enforced, until finally the momentous character of the choice lying before each man is declared, the importance of selecting as the foundation of his life-building the true righteousness, which is like the rock, and not the false righteousness of Scribe and Pharisee, of self-pleasing and self-deceiving men, which is like the shifting sand.

In gathering up the lessons of the similitude before us, let us consider how it sets forth, first, the season of opportunity, and then the day of trial.

## I.

**First, the season of opportunity.**

Two men are about to build, each a house for himself. The character of the building, as well as of the locality which our Lord almost certainly has in view here, may be understood from the descriptions which Eastern travellers give us at the present day.\* The house of a Syrian peasant was at best a very frail structure. The walls were often entirely of mud, though in the case before us they were possibly of unhewn stones, "daubed," in the language of the prophet, "with untempered mortar."† "The roof was made by heaping a thick layer of earth over the brush, thorns, and cane which were laid on the beams to receive it." It frequently happened that no imperfection in the foundation was necessary to bring the building to the ground and to imperil the lives of its inhabitants. The roof, saturated with rain, would fall through by its own weight, and the stones, failing to be held together by the "untempered mortar," would sink into a heap beneath the violence of the storm. The danger would be much increased if, as seems to be intended

\* Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (Nelson: 1870), pp. 390-1.

† Ezekiel xiii. 10.



here, the house was built in one of those ravines which everywhere intersect the mountain ranges of Palestine. We are told how, in such localities, a torrent is suddenly formed by the rains among the hills, and comes sweeping all before it in its descent through what a few minutes before had been a dry channel. Very important was it in such circumstances to have a secure foundation, as anything built upon the mere sand or gravel was soon undermined, and nothing could then save the already tottering walls.

But at the point at which we first view the two men in our Saviour's discourse, there is as yet not one stone laid upon another. There is the site, and here the materials with which to build. Now all depends upon themselves; now is their season of opportunity; a false step now, and all their labour may be thrown away. And now it is that of the wise builder we read, "He digged deep, and laid the foundation upon a rock." It is no unimportant feature which St Luke adds to the account of St Matthew, when he tells us that "he digged deep." There is a whole revelation of character in that single phrase. It is a picture of sagacity and foresight, of patience, energy, and faith. Of sagacity, for the man recognises the essential conditions of his environment—he recognises the necessity of taking advantage of its peculiarities to provide against its perils; of patience, for he can wait for the fulfilment of his desires until every precaution has been taken; of

energy, for he puts forth strength and skill—nothing that depends upon himself shall be wanting; and he has *faith* that, however unfavourable his surroundings may for the moment appear, the way can be discovered by the steadfast will—the same faith which even at this day, as our colonies in America, Australia, or Africa abundantly testify, can make the desert blossom as the rose. So our Lord would teach us that it is not upon the surface that divine wisdom is to be found. The knowledge of the eternal realities which govern life here and hereafter must be diligently sought after and laboured for. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hid in a field. It is the Spirit that searcheth the deep things of God that speaks to us; and for those things the thoughtless and unreflective have as little taste or inclination as they have feeling or understanding of them. If we would succeed here, we must be possessed by an earnest purpose.

Dig deep; be assured that anything worth having is worth winning by patience and labour. The man of the world studies the laws of Nature, the laws of commercial and social life, that he may not make shipwreck of his fortunes; and so would Christ have us study the laws of the moral world, the laws which make death the wages of sin, and righteousness the life of the soul, that we may not make shipwreck of our faith. The man of the world aims at a golden prize, for the sake of which he is content "to rise up early, and to sit up late, and to eat the bread

of sorrows." The man whom Christ commends aims at a heavenly recompense, for the sake of which he is willing to give up this, and all, and life itself, that he may obtain an entrance into the eternal Kingdom, that the temple of his faith and the work of his life may stand the test of the fire which tries, and that it may abide unmoved, unshaken, even amid the wreck of all around it.

"He digged deep"—so runs the parable. It is an example to be followed. But how? Let us look more closely at Christ's own interpretation. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and *doeth* them, I will show you to whom he is like,"—and then follows our text. It is the uniform strain of His teaching, that precept and practice must go hand in hand. Now the principle which our Lord sets before us here is claimed almost as a discovery of our own day. Are not the latest educational methods those which guide us to the laboratory as well as to the lecture-room, which teach us that the only way truly to acquire knowledge is to apply it practically, which not only appeal to the ear but seek to train the eye and hand? And where do you find this principle more forcibly stated than in Scripture? When in Jerusalem there was a division among the Jews regarding Him, and some despised, while others marvelled at His words, Jesus said, "If any man will do His will"—that is, is willing to do the will of God—"he shall know of the doctrine

whether it be of God." And when the Apostle would enforce the exhortation, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only," this is the argument that he uses: "For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." So fleeting, so useless is the hearing which is not followed by the deed. Be our effort to carry out any commandment of God ever so feeble, be it ever so ineffectual as regards outward results, yet if it has been a sincere endeavour, we shall have learned more from that effort to fulfil it than we could have done had we merely pondered the words of the commandment all our lives long. *True understanding* comes only through action, and in proportion as this resembles a toilsome but tireless digging, will that understanding be more clear and more profound. Let it then be earnestly undertaken, and resolutely carried out; let it be as labour in the sweat of the face, for the experience thus gained can never be forgotten; it will be as refined gold, resisting the utmost fury of the fire by which the wood, hay, and stubble are consumed.

"He digged, and went deep," so the Revised Version of St Luke has it, and laid the foundation on a rock, or, as the Revised Version again more correctly renders the original, "on *the* rock." It is, perhaps, a common misunderstanding of this passage to imagine the wise builder as moving away to some

higher place along the sides of the ravine, or choosing as his foundation some projecting rocky platform, and so placing his house to some extent beyond the reach of storm or torrent. This is to miss the whole point of the parable. It is better to think of the two dwellings as situated side by side, exposed to the same dangers, and only distinguished by that which marked the prudence and imprudence of the respective builders. The wise man builds upon the rock. By digging, that is, he gets beneath the yielding sand, through the crumbling earth, to the firm and immovable rock. There where he stands he builds, only not immediately upon the sand on which his foot rests, but upon the rock which he knows is hidden beneath the surface, and which, by deep digging, may be reached and laid bare. There *is* rock to be reached, if only we diligently search for it. The laws of nature are the rock which the laborious processes of science lay bare ; illusion, prepossession, the inexactitudes of popular knowledge, are the sand which these clear away. The moral order, to which conscience testifies, and which history shows in action, is the rock on which individual and social life must be founded, if they are to be firm and abiding. Beneath the quicksands of opinion there is the rock of truth ; beneath all the aberrations of human conduct there is the rock of a capacity for righteousness and God. How tenderly and graciously our Saviour, when He came in contact with the sinful and thoughtless of His day, cleared away all

that obscured and disfigured the true nobility of the human soul. He showed His faith—and time after time He justified it by the result—that in every heart of man, let it appear ever so worthless and despised, ever so fickle and unreliable, there is a firm rock upon which the edifice of a true life may be built, if only it be reached. There is indeed a truth within us corresponding with the truths without, a law of conscience, answering to the law of God, a reality here, reflecting the reality there. When men heard Christ speak, it was this echo within themselves of what He said—their affinity with the truth responding to the truth, which made them cry, “Surely never man spake like this man.” His teaching seemed, somehow, not unfamiliar; it came back upon them like memories of the past, like songs of his native land to the exile; its proclamations and its demands, its threatenings and its promises, alike received the testimony of their own hearts, that they were true and right. This is the rock which may still be found in every human soul, that in us which God seeks to reach, which every man, if he is wise, will clear from whatever overlies and obscures it. Verily, it often lies deep; and only patient and persevering effort, only the earnest endeavour to do God’s will, can reveal its presence, and render it a fit foundation whereon to rear a true life-building, a temple sacred to the living God.

Such, then, are the considerations which will be of value to us as long as the *season of opportunity* lasts.

To dig deep and lay his foundation upon the rock, was the use which the wise builder made of it. His less prudent neighbour neglected the digging, thought not of the rock, and was content to build his house upon the sand. At last both houses are complete, and to outward view there is little difference between them. Each appears to offer a comfortable home, a reliable shelter. And thus may many a day go by, and peace and joy be as constant in the one as in the other. Without are the piercing sunbeams by day, the creeping chills by night; while within there is rest and security.

## II.

*But see! the day of trial comes.*

The tempest rises, the clouds gather, the torrent comes rushing down. The one house falls, and buries its inhabitants beneath its ruins; the other stands, and affords as safe a refuge as before. Yet it is no mischance which happens there, no mere good fortune which here prevails. It is the folly of the one builder which must there bear the responsibility; it is the wisdom of the other which here meets with its reward.

The realities of life do indeed include the painful as well as the pleasant, the severe as well as the gentle, the dark as well as the bright. Of its troubles,

many are doubtless the consequences and the chastisements of our own foolish and sinful deeds, but many come without our being able to avert them. But we need not, therefore, be unprepared for them. We may even attain to an independence of them. For they are not the only realities. Wide and firm amidst them all is the righteousness of God; from eternity to eternity His love endures. Care and trial, danger and difficulty, come upon all men, but amidst them all a true faith in God is able to sustain, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding will dwell unruffled in the Christian's breast. It is not, indeed, the godless alone who have reason to tremble at the approach of the day of trial; but every professing follower of Christ, who is by lip service only attached to His cause, who has never cared to ask himself what he really and truly believes, who with his heart has not attached himself to the Saviour—such an one has even greater cause for fear. “The house fell, and great was the fall of it”—all the greater if from a greater height, even as the fall of Judas, who, from an Apostle, became the betrayer of his Master. “Why do ye not the things that I say?” Such is the burden of the whole. Dig deep—do the will of God, faithfully, from the heart; otherwise your attentive hearing, your answering emotions, your open profession, your whole Christianity—all that you dream you have in it, all that you hope for from it—wants that indispensable element of reality, and is false and



vain. Be true, therefore ; be honest with yourselves ; do not try to hush your consciences to sleep ; and when the surface of your life seems smooth and fair and joyous, do not be led to forget its dangerous depths. Be true to God, to truth, to goodness, to right. Now is your season of opportunity ; soon may its sun go down, and night and winter render all striving fruitless. Only be sure of your foundation ; know in whom you believe, whom you follow, to whom the allegiance of the heart, the obedience of the life, are given. Then all things will be yours, not in imagination or aspiration only, but in reality. Life and death are yours ; nay, eternity is yours, if ye are Christ's, as Christ is God's.

NOTE.—For several thoughts in this discourse, the writer is indebted to Steinmeyer's *Beiträge zum Schriftverständnis*, I., pp. 221-37.

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